



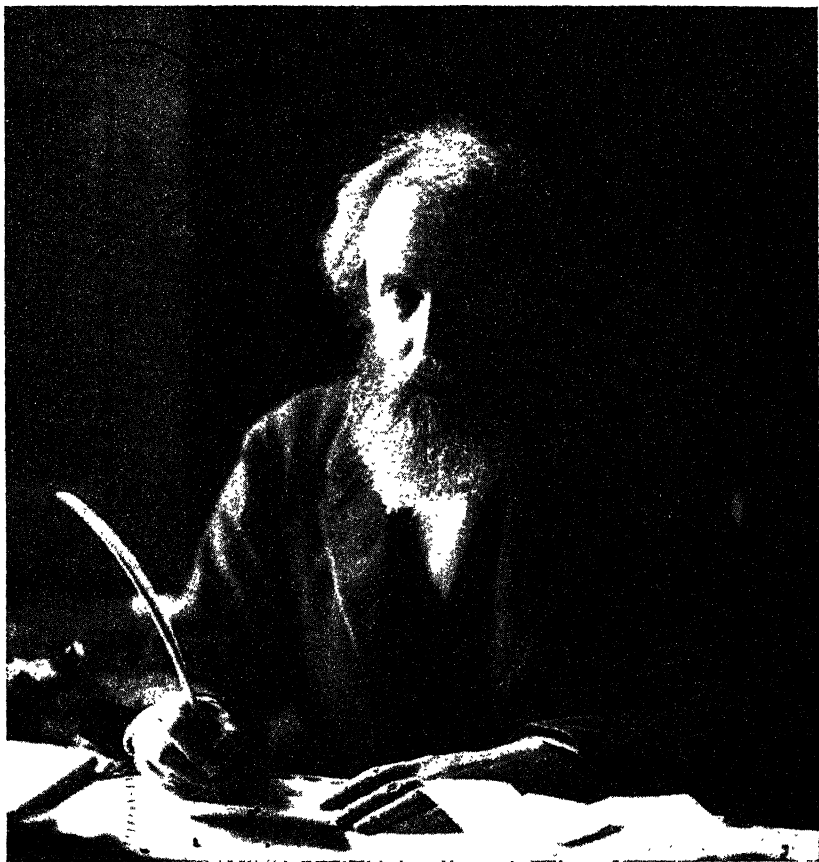




WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT: 1840-1922







[*Elliott & Fry*]

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT

WILFRID SCÄWEN  
BLUNT

1840—1922

*by*

EDITH FINCH



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EDITH FINCH



*to*

*D.G.F. and E.B.F.*



FOREWORD, CHILDHOOD AND  
YOUTH

## I

THE man whose story is told in the following pages seemed in his lifetime to be a champion of lost causes and was certainly regarded as an unmitigated nuisance by those who were directing the policy of England. In the light of subsequent developments it is apparent that he understood more profoundly than the powerful of his day the problems of Empire and the British tradition of handling races. From one point of view he is merely romantic, and possibly frivolous and self-absorbed; from the other, he is an interpreter of the deepest and wisest instincts of the Anglo-Saxon race. For this reason, and especially at this moment, his career is well worth following. That he was a true poet and master of the art of living and also imbued with the habits and standards of his class makes all these aspects of him more interesting, if a little more complicated.

Gifted in too many ways to be supreme in any one, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, by the same token lived with extraordinary gusto a life, as he remarked, of 'real romance'. His name suggests to some people Egyptian Nationalism or Irish prisons or travels in Arabia; to others, sonnet sequences; and to a more intimate group a singularly handsome man of the world, vain, proud, part squire, part squire of dames, part breeder of Arabian horses, a dangerous politician, and yet somehow emphatically one of themselves. He had the love of beauty and adventure and the many accomplishments of the Renaissance gentleman and is often called an Elizabethan. None the

less he was thoroughly Victorian, permeated by the self-consciousness and moral questioning of his own day. His independence places him among the aristocratic rebels who were the inheritors of Byron and Shelley in the second half of the nineteenth century.

His fame is now beginning to emerge from the obscurity into which, as often happens, it fell after his death. Certain of his best poems are found in the anthologies and his published diaries are increasingly read. Recent memoirs and books about Imperial politics mention him. The younger generation of English intellectuals is aware of him as a poet and knight errant—a little old-fashioned, perhaps, in the grand manner but on the right track, a 'scourge of the oppressor'.

From his travels among peoples whom he regarded as oppressed he realized whither Victorian Imperialism was leading—often has led. He urged measures on behalf of India, Egypt, Ireland, which have in many cases been adopted, and prophesied with startling foresight certain post-war disasters. Time has proved him to be no sentimental visionary.

His anti-Imperialism arose not from any lack of pride in England and her destiny but from genuine patriotism. The gradual development of his ideas makes this clear as does the almost fanatical devotion with which he clung to his own countryside. The Sussex Weald became to him the last entrenchment of the traditions and virtues which he cherished as most truly English. Newbuildings Place where he lived out his last years and where he is buried in the Sussex fields

which gave me birth

And saw my youth, and which must hold me dead

is haunted by his ghostly presence. Nothing has been changed there since his death in 1922. With the passage of time the yew hedges have grown tall and unkempt. Weeds and vine tendrils hide the garden steps. The Arab mare still grazing in the paddock and the spaniel snoozing under the trees of the Jubilee garden are old and fat. Inside the house the furniture

has become shabby and the colours are faded. But around any turning at any moment it seems as if Wilfrid Blunt might appear—a tall distinguished figure, bearded and brilliant-eyed, majestic in Arabian robes.

## 2

For three hundred years or more the Blunts can be traced back in Sussex history. Only two streams of non-Sussex blood, of West Country blood, ran in their veins: that of the Glanvilles of Catchfrench and the Scawens of Molennic, 'The latter "a mere old British stem" as the historians of Cornwall quote'. Of this stem Wilfrid Blunt was left the senior representative with the right of quartering its arms. But it was in his Sussex forebears that he was most interested and their estates that he cherished. He edited and had privately printed various documents relating to the Crabbet estate, his father's richest inheritance; he wrote a history of Newbuildings, the part of his family possessions that he himself enlarged; and he also edited those plodding pages from the *Diary of Mr. John Baker* from which fall a few dry crumbs of welcome detail about the Blunts.

Mr. John Baker, a wealthy city business man, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century moved to Horsham Park in Sussex. He quickly became friendly with the neighbouring gentry and his account of them, 'their daily lives and doings, their feastings and amusements, their church-goings, their card-playings and their judgments on the bench' through its very pedestrianism gives reality to the worthy people who figure there. More to the point, it brings a flicker of life to Samuel Blunt and his second wife,<sup>1</sup> Winifred Scawen, and their three small sons Robert, William, who was Wilfrid Blunt's great grandfather, and Harry.

It was in the days of this Samuel, justice of the peace and chairman of the Horsham Bench of Magistrates, that the Blunt



estates attained to their full extent. The Blunts of Horsham had been settled for four generations on lands known in Wilfrid Blunt's time as Springfield House, bought in 1660 by Samuel Blunt's great-grandfather. Samuel possessed a landed estate scattered over no less than eighteen parishes of Sussex and two of Surrey. By his marriage in 1762 with Sarah Gale, his first marriage, he came into possession of the estates of Crabbet and Newbuildings and the manor and forest lands of Worth. Four generations later, Wilfrid Blunt leased Springfield House to his cousin, Gerald Blunt, great-grandson of Samuel's youngest son, Harry, and himself inhabited Crabbet Park for a quarter of a century before moving to Newbuildings.

The Blunt side of the family was evidently solid and typical of its social status. In the Scawens, however, there was something more adventurous that showed itself later in Blunt's father, Francis Scawen Blunt, and even more definitely in Blunt himself. Winifred Scawen, Samuel Blunt's second wife, boasted an uncle, William Scawen, who 'died a much despised man' and a brother, Captain John Scawen, who fought with 'Fighting Fitzgerald', ruined himself in racing, and went out to India where he died in 1800.

Francis Blunt, at sixteen, directly after leaving Harrow, joined the First Grenadier Guards as a junior ensign and fought under Sir John Moore in the Peninsular War. He was wounded while carrying the colours in the Battle of Corunna and was brought home to Plymouth aboard the *Victory*, along with the brace of pointers and the fowling piece which he had taken out with him for sport by the way and the heavy mahogany desk and still heavier box of papers which had accompanied him through the campaign. The wound had been neglected and, though his life was saved through the kind offices of his uncle Glanville of Catchfrench and the devoted nursing of his cousins, he was permanently lamed and obliged to leave the army. After the peace of Paris he made the Grand Tour of Europe, returning, according to his

son Wilfrid, free from those 'grosser English prejudices' so prevalent among his contemporaries and possessed of accomplishments unusual with Englishmen of his generation: he spoke Italian, French and Spanish; he had 'learned painting' in Italy; and he sang to his own piano accompaniment. He began to take considerable pride in having been a younger contemporary of Byron at Harrow and even greater pride in having been born in 1790 in the same parish of Horsham in which Shelley was born two years later. These extraordinary satisfactions, however, did not prevent his upholding with relish his worldly position. He became a keen shot with rifle and fowling-piece and bow, a lover of cockfights and racing and boxing, a member of Crockford's Club, a frequenter at one time of the Prince Regent's set at Brighton—though 'never one of its more vicious members'—later a forward rider at Melton in its best day, and at the time of his death Master of the Crawley and Horsham foxhounds. He was an able out-of-door speaker, and a justice of the peace and deputy-lieutenant of the county. Needless to say, he was a Tory in politics, and owing to his military training, a staunch supporter of the Duke of Wellington. Owner of 'some four thousand acres of land, mostly poor but very beautiful, in the most beautiful of southern counties' he was, after the tradition of his family, first of all a squire. His greatest pride lay in being an efficient proprietor and a respected landlord. Years after his death his son Wilfrid wrote of him: 'In him I see reflected the better, more adventurous, happier side of my man's nature.'

Fortunately—or was it unfortunately?—Francis Blunt married in 1838 Mary Chandler with whom a less robust, though possibly more intellectual strain entered the family. High-spirited, sensitive, fascinating, she had inherited a 'certain Shandian wit' possessed by her father, the rector and squire of Witley near Godalming, and her uncle, the Dean of Chichester. Cardinal Manning told Wilfrid that she was the wittiest woman he had known—an opinion largely borne

out, her son thought, by her letters. Wilfrid Blunt's own recollection of her was as a tall pale widow, dark-eyed, delicate of frame, passionately fond of her children—especially of Wilfrid himself—'brilliant in talk but sad in the memory of joys departed', 'forever seeking vainly in thought for a heaven no longer to be found upon the earth she loved'. Her three children, Francis Scawen, Wilfrid Scawen and Alice Mary, inherited not only her tubercular malady, but, more happily, her charm and her poetical, restless nature.

## 3

Wilfrid was born on August 17th, 1840, not at Crabbet Park, his father's house, but at Petworth where his mother had gone to stay with her husband's sister, Mary, wife of George Wyndham, later first Baron Leconfield.<sup>2</sup> The connection with the Wyndham family was to be close throughout Wilfrid's life. Within a little more than two years Wilfrid's father died, the children were left wards in Chancery and the Blunt property was entailed upon the eldest son Francis, a child of three, fifteen months older than Wilfrid. A year later, when Wilfrid was three years old, Crabbet had to be let, and the family moved to Petworth Rectory House. This year at Petworth where he played with his somewhat older Wyndham cousins provided Wilfrid with his earliest memories: the deer in the park; the fawn which fed out of his cousin Caroline's hand; the emus; the tortoises in the courtyard by the tennis court; the red admiral and peacock butterflies in the kitchen garden; 'the herd of swine which sometimes trooped in at the open window and rioted through the long reception suite on the ground floor'; the gigantic dolls' house at the foot of the stairs; and all the other glories of the great house, 'a vision of mundane stateliness and size'.

The continuity and homeliness of life at Petworth was brought into relief in Wilfrid's mind later by the changing

scene of his own next years. Owing chiefly to his mother's restlessness the Blunts moved from pillar to post, paying family visits, settling for a year or so here or there in England or on the continent. When he reflected on his childhood long afterwards this lack of a fixed abode seemed to Wilfrid to be 'a considerable misfortune, for a life to be perfect should have for its beginning the strong and definite visual impression of a permanent home. . . . It almost seems,' he wrote, 'as if the ideal life ought to begin and end under the same roof tree.'

The family's first journey on the continent was in 1846 when they drove in the huge ancient travelling chariot used by their father through Normandy and the southern provinces of France to the Pyrenees. Perched aloft on the box beside Robert Moorey, the grumbling old family retainer who was highly military and detested the French, the small boys enjoyed themselves more and more keenly.

When we neared the mountains crowned with snows,  
And heard the torrents roar, our wonder grew  
Over our wit, and a new pleasure rose  
Wild in our hearts, and stopped our tongues with dread,  
The sense of death and beauty overhead.

They spent the summer in the foothills at Bagnères de Bigorre where their garden, garnished with orange trees in tubs, ran down to the river Adour. Riding turn and turn about on a rough hill pony they made short excursions into the mountains with their mother—'I remember that she gathered us a gentian which first revealed to me the meaning of beauty as a reality of pleasure.' She taught them the favourite Victorian pastime of pressing flowers and fastening them in a book. 'I have it still,' Wilfrid wrote in 1886,

a book with pages sewn  
Cross-wise in silk, and brimming with those flowers,  
Treasures we gathered there, long sere and brown,  
The ghosts of childhood's first undoubting hours.

At 'La Colombière', an avenue of tall beeches some miles away in the hills, they watched, half terrified, pigeons being netted on their spring passage northwards from Spain. 'I think there is something instinctively attractive in a net as though it concealed a danger,' Blunt commented when he was an old man. 'Such is a spider's web, and such perhaps was later the fascination tennis had for me with the mystery of its netted galleries.' With an even greater dread, instilled in them by their Calvinistic Scotch nurse, they were impressed by the Roman Catholic ceremonies at Bigorre: the profession of a nun in the convent church, and 'the lighting the bonfire of St. John on Midsummer Eve, which took place on the Cous-tousse in the presence of the local clergy headed by a mitred bishop with full Roman pomp'.

After wintering at Pau they returned to England, stayed for some weeks with their great-uncle old Dean Chandler in the Deanery at Chichester, and the two boys paid a few days' visit to the tenant living at Crabbet, a visit of enchantment to them, for Crabbet was their rightful home, the playground of their fancies, where they dreamed of one day living. But it was only a drop of happiness in a bitter cup—in August 1847 they were sent off to their 'slave days' at a private school at Twyford on the Itchen four miles from Winchester.

Wilfrid, shy and sensitive and not very strong, had been spoiled at home. He hated being plunged into the midst of sixty boys all older than he. And Francis was unable to protect him from their bullying. 'Morally the school was a sink', the sanitary conditions were of the worst, the food was insufficient, and the winter cold biting. As neither of the boys complained Mrs. Blunt did not realize the situation until the third summer, when Wilfrid fell seriously ill and she was sent for. Then she snatched her sons away for another winter of slow travel in the family coach on the continent. The experience of Twyford was one from which Wilfrid was long in recovering. It had been

Childhood embittered, its brute joys the same,  
 Only in place of kindness cruelty,  
 For courage fear, and for vain-glory shame.

But it had made him, he felt, more sensitive to happiness, more conscious of degrading ugliness, than most men.

Back in England again the following autumn the boys were expecting to go to Harrow when their mother suddenly informed them that they were to travel in Italy with a tutor. On their arrival at Boulogne a second blow, 'a very hard blow', fell upon them. Their mother explained that she had been received into the Roman Church at Easter. Aware that she had given the children little instruction in religious doctrine because of her own uncertainties and that their Scotch nurse had taught them to look upon the social and intellectual gap between Papists and Protestants as abysmal, she had lacked courage to tell them of her conversion until they were again on foreign soil. While at Petworth she had come under the influence of Henry Edward Manning, rector of Lavington and a constant visitor at her house, as he continued to be until her death. Manning at that time was a high church Anglican and under his guidance Mrs. Blunt threw herself 'with all the zeal of her speculative nature' into the Tractarian Movement. In the summer of 1844 when the Blunts were living at Alverstoke, she saw a great deal of the high church clergy there: Samuel Wilberforce, rector of the parish, and the curates, Henry Burrows, Malan the philologist, and Trench, later Archbishop Trench. She now told her children of Manning's growing dissatisfaction with Protestant tenets, his resignation of the living at Lavington, his entering the Roman Catholic Church, and of her following him there. The children, filled with unspeakable shame, burst into tears.

Before the end of the winter, however, with the aid of the tutor, 'an Oxford muscular Christian of the Kingsley type', himself a recent convert to Rome, the conversion of the children was duly accomplished. Francis, always the most

docile and naturally pious, capitulated first; Wilfrid took longest, because of pride and fear of what other boys would think. At Shrovetide, 1852, at Aix-en-Provence the three young Blunts were received with pomp into the Roman Catholic Church, and Wilfrid, aged eleven, soon found happiness in swinging a censer at the Capuchin Convent close by their house in Genoa.<sup>3</sup> The conversion changed the direction of the children's lives. Though Wilfrid never became as devout a Roman Catholic as his brother and sister, his character and habit of mind were permanently affected and throughout his life his sympathy with the church is evident. As he wrote later,

'Tis no small matter to have lived in Rome,  
In the Church's very bosom and abode,  
Cloistered and cradled there, a child of God.

As summer approached the Blunts drove along the Corniche to Lucca, settling at Bagni di Lucca. In the chestnut groves near by lived two other families of English children whose parents were recent converts, the Mannings, children of the Cardinal's brother, and the Laprimaudayes, children of the Cardinal's curate at Lavington, the Reverend Charles Laprimaudaye. It was new to the Blunts to have friends of their own age and they rejoiced in them.

Annie, the eldest Laprimaudaye daughter, tall, beautiful, kind, 'both grave and gay', 'with eyes of almond shape and cheeks of milk and roses', became Wilfrid's first love. She was sixteen and he approaching twelve; a distance between them so great that he adored her silently, remotely, as a saint. The last walk of the summer brought the first kiss, a farewell embrace, the climax of an idyll, Wilfrid's first seraphic vision of happiness. Despite its childish beginning, the devotion was a lasting one, ending only much later, when convent walls in Rome closed upon Annie, 'nor even wholly then, if all things should be told, seeing that it found fruition, not indeed with her, but with a kindred personality in after years'.

In December the Blunts crossed Mt. Cenis on sledges to return to England, where an experience 'more spiritually important' than any he had yet known awaited Wilfrid. In the first week of 1853, Mrs. Blunt placed the boys with the Jesuits at Stonyhurst,<sup>4</sup> settling herself at Mortlake on the Thames. The choice of this school was wise, for, as Blunt pointed out, only among the Jesuits is the doctrine of the Church's infallibility pushed to its logical limits and placed on a personal basis of obedience to those who expound it. The system has a strict rule of conduct and of belief that completely subjugates the soul to the Church. For Wilfrid, handsome, charming, self-willed, idle and with no zeal like his brother's for piety, it provided the discipline that was essential to strengthen his character.

The life at Stonyhurst, though no less rigorous than at Twyford, was a good deal more wholesome. There was constant supervision and no rebellion. Each class was almost a separate school of twenty boys with its special master who, according to medieval tradition, took them straight through syntax, grammar, poetry, rhetoric and philosophy, and those who were to find a vocation in the Church, through divinity. Under this system, the masters had ample opportunity to know their boys thoroughly. Father Thomas Porter, a man of wit and imagination and kindliness, became virtually the spiritual father of Wilfrid's class and very soon gained complete control over Wilfrid himself, caning him when needful and then encouraging him with a word of praise.

Wilfrid much enjoyed writing papers for Father Porter. By one on Death which was read out in class he gained a second prize and the title of Carthaginian Emperor. He wrote also on butterflies for which he had developed a taste in Italy, a taste shared by his school friend, John Gerard. Many years later, Gerard, by that time a worthy matter-of-fact Jesuit and well-known opponent of Darwin, reminded Blunt that they used to keep caterpillars in boxes and that Wilfrid 'had insisted upon pricking holes in the lids in the form of



constellations so that the caterpillars inside might think they were still out of doors and could see the stars'—a highly characteristic attempt on Blunt's part to restore to the imprisoned a glimpse at least of their natural environment.

For Father Porter's sake Wilfrid made a spiritual retreat, was prepared for communion and taught that this life is but a preparation for the future life. With the alternative of Heaven or Hell set before him, he was logical enough to see that the future was the only life worth living for. 'At that time,' he wrote in 1876, 'I vividly felt God's presence as a reality in my daily occupations. I did my best to please Him; but I do not remember that any special token of His presence was given me.'

If he had returned, as he intended to do, after the first half-year's vacation and the influence of Father Porter had persisted, he thought later, he might have become a Jesuit. It seemed to him that he was of the stuff of which Jesuits are made—little, he admitted, as his history appeared to prove it—and he longed for the simplification of life enforced by so strict an order. 'The Jesuit novitiate,' as he wrote in 1911, 'is the most mentally crushing process ever invented,' but it would at least have freed him from his most troublesome doubts and responsibilities and would have brought him peace. Once at home on holiday from Stonyhurst, however, he was allowed to remain and, gradually falling into old habits, developed in the next few years in ways that he looked back upon with no great satisfaction.

## 4

At this time Sir Henry Taylor, author of *Philip Van Artevelde*, was living at Sheen, near the Blunts' Mortlake home, his household the centre of many of the intellectual and artistic personages of the day. Foremost of this group was

the eccentric and imperious Mrs. Cameron.<sup>5</sup> One day when calling upon his mother, Mrs. Cameron saw several of Wilfrid's drawings and promptly espied in them traces of embryo genius. Wilfrid had always had a taste for drawing, inherited probably from his mother, who herself had done 'many admirable pencil drawings' of the seventeenth century cottages of Witley. At Stonyhurst he had been encouraged to follow this bent. Now, urged by the redoubtable Mrs. Cameron, he put whatever time he could spare from natural history in Richmond Park and on Barnes Common and from rowing on the Thames into painting under the instruction of a local German artist of no skill but some teaching ability.

Having no money to pay a model and feeling himself too inexpert to ask any of his friends to sit to him, he painted his own portrait as he believed he had looked a few years before. It hangs now at Newbuildings, and is an extraordinarily mature piece of work to be done by a boy of fourteen. Mrs. Cameron, delighted with the fulfilment of her prognostications, at once declared that G. F. Watts should take the boy as pupil. Wilfrid, accordingly, was escorted to Little Holland House and Watts, despite the fact that he never took pupils, was persuaded to take this one. During six months before going to the master Wilfrid was to receive preliminary instruction at a studio in Newman Street. For three days a week for some time he made chalk drawings from plaster casts and occasionally from a living model; but the day when he was to go to Watts never came. His mother's illness and death ended the idea of his becoming a painter by profession before his apprenticeship began. Years later he sometimes regretted this—less however than his departure from the Jesuits—and he continued both to paint as an amateur and to be deeply interested in painting and in all the arts except music, which he definitely disliked.

Mrs. Blunt died early in June 1853. This early contact with death confounded Wilfrid; it was the first step on the

way to the realization from which much of his later thought and poetry sprang, that

Every creature that hath breath  
Goeth with the taint of death.

Mrs. Blunt had named as the children's guardian Dr. Grant, the excellent Catholic Bishop of Southwark, an appointment the Lord Chancellor set aside as not legal in favour of the children's nearest relations: on their father's side, Mrs. Wyndham, later Lady Leconfield, known to them as 'Aunt Wyndham'; on their mother's side, her first cousin, Henry Currie<sup>6</sup> of the family of bankers—both Protestants. Though they did not try to influence the children religiously, leaving the boys at Oscott, the Catholic School where they had been during the last three months of their mother's illness, and sending Alice to a convent school at Roehampton, their guardianship effectually ended the Roman Catholic character of the children's home surroundings. Their holiday time was spent in an atmosphere not of the church, but of the world. With Mrs. Wyndham they moved in the best London circles; with Henry Currie at the beautiful old Jacobean house of West Horsley Place in Surrey they poached about with muzzle-loaders alone or with the keeper after rabbits on the common and sometimes shot a pheasant over the borders on the East Horsley land, Lord Lovelace's, 'little dreaming of the family connection there was one day to be' between Wilfrid and Lord Lovelace. They danced, played battledore, read poetry and fancied themselves in love with their pleasant Currie cousins.

The first months at Oscott had been marked only by mental sloth and complete moral and physical relaxation; even the play was on a lower level than at Stonyhurst. The school was 'a place without religious colour of any kind, a sort of "Sleepy Hollow", where nobody was quite wide awake enough to be vicious. It suited my natural indolence,' Blunt wrote years afterward, 'to a most unfortunate degree; and, though I con-

tinued to be a "good boy" it was without intelligence, and without fervour.' Religion at Oscott was unattractive: the boys were mostly coarse and rowdy; the President, Dr. Weedall, preached his sermon on holiday afternoons, a system well calculated to antagonize his pupils. 'The soul cried out for more; and at last more was provided': in 1856, when Wilfrid at the beginning of his third year was in the highest class, Dr. Charles Meynell became its newly appointed professor.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Meynell was a brilliant Yorkshireman, at the time not quite thirty years old, humane, courageous, 'a poet by temperament if not by performance', and accomplished in up-to-date metaphysics, though no modernist in the sense of being an anti-Rome partisan. Wilfrid, who always responded to any interest shown in himself, quickly came under the influence of 'that man of original genius'. By Meynell his instincts of an inquiring and poetic kind were awakened. Together they read and discussed the poets, unorthodox though they might be. Under Dr. Meynell's guidance Blunt learned to rank Shelley and Keats above Scott and Byron and even Wordsworth. Not only was his critical taste sharpened, but, more important, the 'ambition of romance' was aroused which, he said later, made a poet of him.

Meynell became Blunt's intellectual father as Father Porter had been his spiritual father. Father Porter had based the truths of religion on the heart; Dr. Meynell taught Blunt 'to think, to reason, to argue. . . . The Jesuits had been afraid of reason'. And they had been right, Blunt thought long afterwards. They had forbidden him to read a little book sent him by his mother in which the motto occurred, 'through the contemplation of created things, by steps we may ascend to God'. But Dr. Meynell felt no such qualms. He showed Blunt 'God in his works, in the necessities of the human mind, in the metaphysical contradictions involved by a denial of Him. At that time,' Blunt wrote, 'I believed with the most implicit faith that not only were the truths of religion reducible

to absolute mathematical certainty, but that true reason could not do otherwise than fortify and illuminate our belief in them.' When, years later, he thought that he recognized in this reliance on reason the source of his restlessness and spiritual misery he turned with perfect justice for help to Dr. Meynell, the old friend whose teaching had drawn him away from his earlier, happier attitude of acceptance.

It was in the summer of 1876, that, breaking a twenty-years' silence, Blunt wrote proposing to lay before Dr. Meynell his 'position on certain fundamental questions, involving life and death' to his soul, asking his old master 'to throw the light of Christian philosophy upon it.' 'I would give,' he wrote, 'everything I possess for a reasonable excuse to abandon reason, or better still, to find a cure for my madness in reason itself, a hair of the dog that bit me.' The two questions that he put were: 'Is there a reasonable probability (apart from the teaching of the Church), of the existence of a personal God, just and merciful, who rules the world?' and 'What are our chances of a future life?' The discussion arising from these two fundamental questions and Dr. Meynell's answers to them were published in a small, brown, typically Victorian volume of letters entitled *Proteus and Amadeus, A Correspondence*, a volume interesting now less for the arguments used than for the light it throws upon the painful 'sturm und drang' period of Blunt's young manhood and his later attitude towards religion.<sup>8</sup>

The metaphysical bent shown in these letters Blunt himself felt he had gained at Oscott. Perhaps it would be truer to say that Dr. Meynell had succeeded in awakening the intellectual honesty of his pupil and in stimulating his latent abilities. Until then Wilfrid had thought of himself with supreme humility; from that time he was aware of considerable mental ability and also of his great good looks. The year 1857, when he left Oscott at the age of seventeen, marked the beginning of a self-consciousness that was the turning point of his youth.

With his brother Wilfrid spent the next summers on walking tours in Skye and the Western Highlands and in Switzerland. They scaled Monte Rosa 'in the unprecedented time of twelve hours there and back to the Riffelberg Hotel'; they crossed the Col du Géant in the Mont Blanc region, and climbed from the Jardin to near the summit of the Aiguille Verte, 'a really dangerous piece of rock work'. On one climb in the high Alps Wilfrid was nearly killed by an avalanche of stones, getting a nasty wound in the head which, oddly enough, gave both brothers confidence. To his astonishment, Wilfrid began to feel a courage that was, he wrote, 'a revelation of the possibilities of manly action in the world which never left me afterwards; and I think my physical cowardice thus easily overcome has been in part the reason of what moral courage I have had at my command in later years. If the tremendous powers of nature, I reasoned with myself, can be thus met and conquered, why should I be afraid of man.'

Not long after his accident he was the only one of a party of English boys at cricket near Lausanne to stand his ground against the irate Swiss owner of the meadow they were trampling down. As the peasant approached brandishing a spade Wilfrid darted under his upraised arm and planted two blows in his face, drawing blood. The occasion marked, he observed, the first day of his 'self-confidence as a man able to deal with men'.

Though his formal schooling ended with Oscott, he had continued his studies during the following winters. While Francis was *en pension* at Lausanne learning French and German and his sister was at the convent school of the Sacré Cœur at Roehampton, Wilfrid lived in London reading with a tutor to prepare himself for the Indian Civil Service examination, which was at that time a novelty. He lodged at the house of 'one Walford', who was soon to do him a very ill turn; and he coached with a Cambridge wrangler, who took no

interest in him scholastically, and with an Oxford classics scholar who embraced the opportunity to indulge his own taste for Greek poetry, particularly in the less known and fragmentary texts. The latter, however, gave Blunt what education he was to have in the dead languages and a topographical and heroic interest in Greece that was of use to him later at Athens.

In the season Mrs. Wyndham launched him in London society, giving him the entrée of half a dozen or so great houses, but his natural shyness combined with a lack of pocket money and fairly strong Roman Catholic principles, kept him from indulging in many follies. He fell in love with his cousin Mary Currie, who took him into favour and read Tennyson's *Maud* with him, giving him to understand that she was its heroine. This innocent affair and his attachment for his cousin Constance Wyndham and the two younger cousins, Edith and Sibyl Montgomery, kept his thoughts well occupied.

On a fixed day each week he spent some hours with his sister. Perhaps because she was not unlike him in temperament, he was especially fond of her. 'Beautiful of face, dark-eyed but pale and rather puny through ill health, she was one of those in whom the soul seemed always to overbear the body and so emotional that not a day passed for her . . . till she was sixteen without some passionate outburst leading her to tears.' She was witty and charming and had some talent for verse; the lovely sonnet beginning

Spring of a sudden came to life one day

among her brother's Proteus sonnets was written by her. 'For her sake, and that later of others,' Wilfrid loved, 'the Roehampton convent.' Yet his sister's decision later to enter it as a nun was the occasion of his first break with the Church.

## DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

## I

Two months after Wilfrid's eighteenth birthday a son-in-law of Mrs. Wyndham failed to pass the examination required for nomination to the diplomatic service. Mrs. Wyndham managed to have the place transferred to Wilfrid and, in preparation for the examination, sent him for a short time to Orléans to polish his French. He lodged at the Evêché under the charge of the well-known bishop of the diocese, Monseigneur Dupanloup, and acquired along with the language considerable insight into French clerical problems. He made friends with one Père Shuvaloff, a Russian priest exiled from the Czar's court, who found in him, as Cardinal Manning had done, a possible Catholic neophyte. But Wilfrid's thoughts were far from the church and full of London balls and parties and of his prospects at the Foreign Office.

In early November, he passed his examination and obtained a nomination to the diplomatic service. The matter seemed definitely settled. Suddenly an official letter appeared announcing that his appointment would not go forward, as his references were unsatisfactory.

Immediately Mrs. Wyndham ordered her yellow barouche, drove with Wilfrid to the Foreign Office, and sending in her card to the minister, Lord Malmesbury, who had given her the nomination, followed it in person. Her ward was left, shamefaced and alarmed in an outer room to face as best he could the cross examination of Malmesbury's private secretaries, John Bidwell and Drummond Wolff. From them he made out that Walford, with whom he had lived during the previous



winter, had charged him with an attempt on his wife's virtue. It was true that Wilfrid had taken the wife's part in the daily Walford bickerings; once even there had been a slight scuffle followed by a complaint laid against him, a summons and mutual apologies; but, after reporting the affair to his guardians, Wilfrid had thought no more about it. Then Walford, hearing of his nomination had raked the matter up and set it forth with much exaggeration in a formal letter to the Secretary of State.

The two private secretaries, noted wags, spared their prey nothing. By the time he was summoned to follow Mrs. Wyndham to the minister his nerve was shattered. Completely tongue-tied, he burst into tears. Lord Malmesbury, to whom the offence, even had it been true, would perhaps not have seemed heinous, acquitted him at once and, being a compassionate man, asked him and 'Aunt Wyndham' home to lunch with his wife. Though for years the clerks of the Foreign Office clung to the story with glee, Wilfrid was gazetted on the last day of 1858, as unpaid attaché.

English diplomacy at this time was essentially pacific and, in words characteristic of the later Blunt, 'devoid of those subtleties which have since earned it the reputation of astuteness at the cost of its honesty'. Young diplomats were expected only to be socially agreeable and to amuse themselves as decorously as possible. His diplomatic experience, though it developed in him for the time a distaste for politics, taught him not to be deceived by the 'common insincerities which are the stock in trade of diplomacy' nor to mistake for public policy action which was only personal. He gained some professional knowledge of the machinery of foreign politics and made the acquaintance of many important figures of the day. When he resigned at the end of a decade, he was glad to preserve the diplomatic connection 'on a friendly footing as of one honourably retired from the Service'.

His first post was at H.M. Legation at Athens.<sup>1</sup> With an allowance of £200 from his guardians he was launched into a

new life and for the first time savoured something of the East. Bandit chiefs were still to be met in the best Athenian society. 'King Otto wore the Albanian *fustanelle*, and that and the costume of the Islands, with its immense balloon-like calico nether garments and red cap, were the common dress of the young Greek bloods.' At the legation he found 'that good Irishman', Sir Thomas Wyse, with William Eliot, afterward Lord St. Germans, for the first Secretary, and Drummond and Digby as fellow attachés. Soon Lord Dufferin and his mother, 'most delightful of women', arrived on their way from Egypt to join the legation circle. Outside that circle too, Blunt made many friends. To his intellectual profit he spent long hours of discussion with Finlay, the 'distinguished Socratic sage', who was living a hermit's life in the foothills of Pentelicus. Many days were passed with two honest Swiss families, the Wilds and Leutweins. And with the Leutweins' daughter Helen he fell deeply in love.

The youngest member of the embassy, only eighteen years old, Blunt, with his delicate almost feminine beauty and high soft voice, was a great favourite. He had a vivid personality and a kind of magnetism that made it impossible for anyone to remain indifferent to him. On an old white horse, named Apocalypse in memory of Shelley's lines, he led the merry party that twice a week followed a paper-chase. Sometimes they made longer expeditions, exploring the interior and voyaging in open caiques to white Sunium and the desert islands near it. In the spring when Francis, then an ensign in the 60th Regiment, came out on leave to join his brother, they journeyed on horseback into the Morea, to Mycenae and Nauplia. No roads existed, only mountain mule tracks; the going was dangerous on account of the robbers still common in the mountains and they felt safer with the pistol and gun that Wilfrid for the first time owned.

As they galloped through the grey olive groves carpeted with poppies, Byron's poetry came constantly to mind, stirring an enthusiasm so strong that it forced Blunt even years later

when he was inclined to write somewhat deprecatingly of Byron as a poet to admit that 'his "Isles of Greece" at any rate was an inspired utterance'. He became a Byron worshipper and began to fancy himself a very Byronic figure, an impression not lessened by his passion for Helen Leutwein and doubtless adding a secret satisfaction to the lighter romance in which he indulged for the blue-eyed, barefoot daughter of Edward Noel, one of the last English Philhellenes. She inspired certain verses in his shabby black notebook beside the more serious lines written to his beloved Helen Leutwein.

He was unable, however, to yield wholeheartedly to his Byron obsession. Instinct and training clashed. His Roman Catholic upbringing forbade all pleasures of the flesh and had taught him to regard earthly love as unworthy. The problem of sex, profoundly disturbing in itself, was complicated by the fact that Helen Leutwein, who died during his second year at Athens, was a Protestant and therefore, according to his teaching, in danger of Hell-fire. The dilemma set him thinking. It was the first step in the struggle for which Dr. Meynell had prepared him in his school-days.

At the end of the summer of 1860 an attack of fever caused him to be transferred to a post in Germany. On the way he paid his first visit to Constantinople where he was retained for some weeks by H.M. Ambassador, Sir Henry Bulwer, to work in the chancellery at Therapia. There for the first time he came into an atmosphere that, because it was pro-Turk and anti-Russian, was not only non-Catholic but definitely non-Christian. It seemed to Blunt that the only ugly elements in Constantinople were the modern Christian elements. 'Here,' he writes, 'was new matter for my religious tolerance to handle and where tolerance begins faith's absolute dominion ends.' Of his friends only certain Swiss Protestants professed religious convictions of any sort. He began to feel awkward in persevering, however lukewarmly, in his religious practices and to realize his disadvantage in not possessing so wide a knowledge of the physical universe as his friends. Because his reading was



WILFRID BLUNT (*circa* 1860)



limited by the bann of his church he could not fortify his religious position with 'scientific facts' as they were able to do.

His journey from Constantinople was taken in a dissatisfied state of mind in which the charm of primitive life was brought into sharp contrast with the so-called advantages of civilization. Riding over the broad plain of the Dobrudja, across wide stretches of grassland unbroken except by a wandering Tartar tribe and grazing camels and 'great eagles sitting in pairs on the mounds' that marked 'the sites of ancient battles where the forgotten slain lay buried', he and his companion entered the sombre patriarchal world of the Old Testament. 'It revealed to me,' Blunt wrote long afterwards, 'the beauty of nature uncivilized, not yet defaced by the creative ugliness of modern man.' They came to the wall of Trajan, once the bulwark of the Roman Empire against the Scythian barbarians of the north, and found 'on its grass-grown bastions' Scythian shepherds with their flocks, playing their reed pipes. For some days they stayed among the shepherds, shooting hares and partridges, then went on by way of Varna and Kustenji to Tchernavoda, where they took steamer up the Danube to Vienna.

In the course of the journey, a Moldavian Hospodor, Prince Bibesco, and his family boarded the boat. With them was an Englishman whose not very distinguished appearance and brusque manner misled Blunt into taking him for the family tutor. During the several days' voyage Blunt made fast friends with 'the tutor', talking with him of the East about which his knowledge proved to be profound. Not until they reached Vienna where the tutor proposed accompanying him to the British Embassy, did Blunt discover that his companion was Henry Stanley, Lord Stanley of Alderley, a strong Philo-Turk, an authority on many Eastern questions, and a Mohammedan to boot. The friendship begun on the Danube lasted throughout Stanley's lifetime, and for Blunt extended itself to all the members of Stanley's family. On arriving in London he saw much of the two younger Stanley sisters, Kate, afterwards Lady

Amberley,<sup>2</sup> and Rosalind, later Lady Carlisle. Beautiful and vivid they whirled Blunt away in an orgy of lively talk with all the piquancy of enthusiastic prejudice. Nothing in heaven or earth passed unquestioned or undiscussed. They stimulated in him an intellectual activity that had much to do with the later individuality of his views and that, more immediately, proved disconcerting during his life in Germany.

## 2

Frankfort early in the year 1861 was rife with religious and philosophical discussion. At the British Embassy Blunt was surrounded by frankly professed doubters and unbelievers. He became very intimate with Lady Malet, the wife of the Ambassador, who, though kindness itself, troubled him—like almost everyone in Frankfort—by her constant speculation on religious problems and her discussion of Darwin's *Origin of Species* and of *Essays and Reviews* by Jowett and his followers. Not only did Blunt feel his inability to read these books a drawback in conversation, but he was oppressed by the belief that only with the aid of first-hand information could he answer the questions arising in his own mind. He burned with desire to know 'the truth':

to hold the actual thing and be  
Bound by no law but hers and liberty.  
Such was my soul's ambition, the fruit fair  
And good for food of the forbidden tree.

He wrote asking if his confessor in England could obtain permission for him to read these books. Receiving a negative answer he read them anyway despite the Roman Index—his 'first deliberate sin', he called it.

Meanwhile he went to England to celebrate Christmas and the coming-of-age of his brother who was now in possession of the family estates. Francis was living at Worth Forest

Cottage, planning to move to Crabbet Park when he had fulfilled the promise made to his mother to endow the estate with a Catholic mission—the Franciscan House and Chapel which he was busy establishing at the neighbouring town of Crawley with the privilege for himself of private mass to be said on Sundays and feast days at Crabbet as soon as he should reside there. Immersed in practical details and already imbued with the religious and monastic point of view, Francis felt little sympathy with his brother's perplexity. In fact, it made him thoroughly impatient. Nor did Wilfrid derive much comfort from his sister.<sup>3</sup>

After finishing her schooling at the Convent at midsummer, Alice had been installed in a dull life with an unsympathetic lady at Crawley. At Christmas she was restless and showed none of her old demonstrative affection for her brother. Disappointed and vexed, he was at a complete loss to explain the change until, not long after his return to Frankfort, she wrote announcing her intention of entering the religious life. A letter from Francis at the same time upheld her decision. Wilfrid was astounded. Alice seemed to him to have settled her life in far too summary a fashion. Moreover, she was the person for whom he cared most in the world and the prospect of losing her acted on him like a challenge. Taking counsel with his fellow attaché Schomberg Kerr, one of whose sisters had entered a convent, and with Lady Malet, he set off immediately for England 'to forbid the banns'.

He went directly to Mrs. Wyndham, now 'Aunt Leconfield', protested to her, then to others, and succeeded, backed by their authority, in persuading Alice to go to her Chandler relatives at Witley and to put off her initiation for two years till she should come of age. By the end of the first year's delay her intention seemed to have vanished from her mind. Her relations with Wilfrid resumed all their old warmth, and her friends—Lady Kenmare, Madeline Wyndham, Georgie Sumner, Minnie Pollen and others—became his friends too. Though Alice never reproached him for thwarting her plans,



later he wondered sometimes if he had not been mistaken, if her life might not have been happier and longer had he not interfered. At the time of her decision, however, no question disturbed his certainty.

The episode crystallized his previous religious perplexity into thorough-going doubt. For the first time he neglected many of the duties of religion. The 'days of his utter night' had begun. He saw 'the alternative of God or nothingness', and was appalled. 'I still believed enough,' he wrote in after years, 'to be greatly frightened at my state of mortal sin, and I was continually expecting to die and suffer eternal punishment in consequence. I dared not, during the whole of one winter, ride across country, for fear of breaking my neck, or did so with fear and trembling.' All serenity hung upon the reconciliation of religion and science.

His endeavours to reason out a possible basis for such reconciliation carried him into materialism. Count Usedom of the Prussian Legation had given him an article to read to which he wrote an answer headed, 'Nec Deus intersit nisi vindice nodus'. It embodied his interpretation of materialism as 'mind an accident of matter', the germ of the Monist philosophy that several years later was to be elaborated by Haeckel. He wrote also the first version of 'Body and Soul' now to be found in its revised form among his published poems. And he wrote the prayer that appeared fourteen years later in his first published volume of verse:

Lighten our darkness, Lord,  
And with thy flaming sword  
Sever the webs that hide from us the light.  
Have we not sought in tears  
Some ransom for our fears  
Some thread of truth to guide us in this labyrinth  
of night?

Blunt's confidant during this period of unhappiness was Lord Schomberg Kerr. His mother, Lady Lothian, had joined

the Roman Catholic Church after her husband's death, so that he could understand to a certain degree the problems which were besetting Blunt. They were constant companions. When they met, Kerr was twenty-seven years old, but, like Blunt who was twenty, he was without sexual experience. Blunt himself had no money for marriage and was 'too romantically exclusive to run after mercenary loves. Had it not been,' he wrote later, 'for the restlessness thus caused, and which was largely dependent on my physical temperament, I might at this time have laid the foundations of a solid professional career. Frankfort was a post just then of importance as the seat of the Germanic Confederation already beginning to be the diplomatic battlefield on which the future of Germany was being fought.' He might, he thought, have been of use to the legation in the Schleswig-Holstein affair.

As it was, he and Kerr lived a fairly secluded life in a small house which they rented outside the town. They plunged into an intellectual debuach of reading and of verse-making about 'the higher cravings of their souls' that left them sad and giddy. 'Oh, the days of our absurd first manhood,' Blunt exclaimed later,

rich in force,  
Rich in desire of happiness and praise  
Yet impotent in its heroic course,  
And all for lack of that one worthless thing,  
Knowledge of life and love and suffering!

The pages of the black note-book were covered with metaphysical verse, some mere doggerel and some, such as the verses at first called 'Ravings' and later 'Faith's Apostasy', to be worked up years afterwards and included among his published poems. They went only occasionally into Frankfort society for the pleasure of 'valsing' but, to the infinite astonishment of their more sedate acquaintances, amused themselves trundling hoops about the streets, wandering in the forest, fraternizing in the bierhalle and visiting the tiergarten. Of this period in

his life he afterwards wrote: 'I felt a call for action of some decided sort which should make up to me for my vanished dreams. . . . Like a boy who has slipped off his clothes to bathe, yet doubtful where and when to make his plunge, I stood shivering on the edge of sexual sin, attracted by it yet in fear where it might lead, and half inclined to wrap myself once more in my beliefs if only I could find excuse in reason to persuade my soul to return.'

Late in the summer of 1862 Blunt was transferred to Madrid and stopped in England on the way to make a retreat at the Redemptorist Convent at Clapham, in a last effort towards faith. Dismissing discussion and the claims of reason, and making a general confession, he prayed that grace might descend upon him. It was of no use: he was unable to say 'I believe'. On leaving the retreat he put all scruples behind him and set himself to enjoy life as thoroughly as he could.

The court ceremonies in which he had to take part in Madrid bored him intolerably. Under the date April 15th, 1904, in one of the matchless vignettes of *My Diaries*, Blunt recalls Queen Isabel of Spain, 'a great fat colourless blue-eyed good-humoured woman, with arms like rounds of raw beef. Beside her, her husband Don Francisco de Assiz, a little stiff man in a much embroidered coat, and the two royal children, the Infanta, a thin anaemic girl of thirteen, and her brother, the little Prince of Asturias a child of six (he was afterwards king), all four personages sitting on great gilt chairs in a row, having their hands kissed by a long procession of Spanish Grandees and officers, the child fast asleep. We of the Diplomatic Corps had to stand just opposite the throne and watch the besa-manos for an hour or more together, thus it is all photographed upon my memory.'

All the same he liked Madrid. Being a Catholic he got on very well with the Spaniards—they called him a 'Christiano' as they did not the other English. He threw himself into a round of Spanish gallantries and used to go to 'a sort of entertainment' where the only refreshments were sugar and water

and each lady brought her 'official lover'. But most exhilarating were the fiestas of the bull ring.

For an Englishman to take a deep interest in bull-fighting is unusual, and for him to take part in it, almost unheard of. But Sir William Gregory, inquiring the name of the matador that he saw at Madrid in 1862, who played his bull with such expert grace

in his gold embroidered jacket and his red cloak and his  
pride,

received the answer, 'Wilfrid Blunt'. Later he told Blunt of this episode saying, 'I wonder you were not afraid', and received the answer: 'I was very much afraid indeed, but I would not give in.' To Blunt perhaps, as to the hero of his proud poem 'Sancho Sanchez', there was more to the matter of bull-fighting than physical beauty and skill and courage or the social good or ill commonly attributed to it:

'Meaning was there from the outset, glorious meaning in  
our calling

In the voice of emulation and our boyhood's pride of soul,  
From the day when first, the capa from our father's  
shoulders falling,

We were seized with inspiration and rushed out upon the  
bull.

'Meaning was there in our courage and the calm of our  
demeanour,

For there stood a foe before us which had need of all our  
skill.

And our lives were as the programme, and the world was  
our arena,

And the wicked beast was death, and the horns of death  
were hell.

'And the boast of our profession was a bulwark against  
danger

With its fearless expectation of what good or ill may  
come,  
For the very prince of darkness shall burst forth on us no  
stranger  
When the doors of death fly open to the rolling of the  
drum.'

## 3

After a year at Madrid, Blunt was transferred to Paris—'this Paris I was doomed to love'—a far different city from the one to which their mother had brought the little Blunts in their family coach years before. Then he had 'witnessed the Prince President's historic ride through the streets to the Place de la Concorde with Morny and the rest of his fellow conspirators in the *coup d'état*'; now as Napoleon III, the Prince was at the climax of his prestige, his court had become the most worldly in Europe, his city the most brilliant.

When Blunt arrived, Paris was *en fête* for the feast of the Assumption and its illuminations as he drove up the Champs Elysées might have been a signal for the life of pleasure he was to lead there. The excitements of Madrid had been a mere stir on the surface compared to the gaiety and licence, the turmoil of alternate ecstasy and suffering upon which he now entered. In it the passion of his youth culminated, leaving its mark upon all his after life—

The past, the future, all of weal or woe  
In his old life was gone, for ever gone.

In September of this year he first met Catherine Walters, or 'Skittles' as she was familiarly known, one of the most renowned courtesans of the late nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

At twenty-three Blunt had seen a good deal of the world, and had passed his apprenticeship in affairs of the heart, but he was still, according to his own description, 'a fair-faced

frightened boy with eyes of truth', still capable of blushing like his 'red, innocent hands'. Skittles, though born only a year before him, was old in experience,

A woman most complete  
In all her ways of loving,

and prodigal of love as one

Who careless of deceit  
And rich in all things is of all things free.

Though not precisely beautiful, her small head with its bright chestnut hair, her delicate clear-cut features, large eloquent grey-blue eyes, her slender figure and sensitive hands, made her very charming. She had extraordinary zest for life but was proud and wayward,

Brave as a falcon and as merciless. . . .  
Untamed, unmated, high above the press.

'As if with change of wind' her mood changed from grave to gay, from amusement to tears. Blunt, in love with love and eager to solve the riddle of life, would have been less than mortal had he not succumbed to her infinite variety.

A liaison with an English Marquis had brought Catherine Walters to Paris, where she gained her nickname by her proficiency in a skittles alley much visited by the young men of the British Legation. Nearly always one or other of them danced attendance on her. Later, in England, many of them became members of the group of men of fashion and of wit that surrounded her. The Sunday parties in Chesterfield Street and afterwards in South Street, Park Lane, were frequented by the Prince of Wales and others famous in England's public life. Even Gladstone, to the delight of Blunt and of Skittles herself, 'came alone to take tea with her, having sent her beforehand twelve pounds of Russian tea'. In public she was to be seen roller-skating with inimitable grace in the new, fashionable rinks of London and Tunbridge Wells, driving the prancing

ponies of her phaeton in Hyde Park, or riding in Rotten Row a horse that had run second in the Grand National and that no one else could ride. The tale is famous of her larking over the eighteen feet wide water-jump at the National Hunt steeplechase in Northamptonshire.

But she had another side. She was interested in modern art, knew something about music, and liked serious reading, even on religious subjects. Her comments were piercing as well as racy.

She went on talking like a running stream,  
Without more reason or more pause or stay  
Than to gather breath and then pursue her whim  
Just where it led her, tender, sad or gay.

And her letters, albeit illiterate and nearly illegible, were highly entertaining. She responded with candour and individuality to any demand of friendship; and she could be depended upon to be generous. Even those who ceased to be her lovers, remained, as Blunt did, her devoted friends.

In after life Blunt is said to have held that Skittles set his passion so full ablaze that it burnt out once for all. No other woman after her could do more than stir the embers. However that may be, she was the heroine of *Esther*, his finest sonnet sequence, and the 'Manon' of the *Love Sonnets of Proteus*, as well as the subject of most of the early love lyrics in the *Sonnets and Songs by Proteus*. Many of his late poems also, hark back to this first grand passion. In a sonnet of 1876 to 'Juliet' he wrote,

Unworthy Egypt yet enslaves my fears.

During the years in Paris there were moments of exalted happiness: 'As long as I was in love,' he wrote in *Proteus and Amadeus*, 'my love sufficed me, and I cannot say . . . that no human love ever satisfied the desires of the soul. I have, on more than one occasion, seemed for days together to be walking some cubits high above the ground.' At other times his



‘SKITTLES’





mistress was 'heartless' and 'soulless'—a 'broken pitcher'; she appeared to him to be all vanity, 'to have sold the keys of heaven at a vulgar rate', to have none of the virtues he could have wished had he chosen her and not been the victim of 'blind desire'. He was obliged to realize the greater success of rivals in her affections; and he felt it would be better

To till the thankless earth with sweat of brow,  
Following dull oxen 'neath a goad of care  
To a boor's grave agape behind the plough  
    . . . . than thus live

Thy pensioner and bondsman, day by day  
Doing a fool's service thus for love of thee.

But he could also write

Kind fate held me, heedless of my prayers,  
A prisoner to its wise mysterious ways.  
And forced me to thy feet—ah, fortunate me!

Such peace, however, as he describes in the lovely poem 'A Day in Sussex', written at Worth in January, 1864, during a short holiday in England, he seldom achieved.

The constant strife of adoration and defeat, and the strain of quickened sensitiveness, took their toll. By the end of 1865 Blunt was worn out; he longed to be 'like David with washed face who ceased to weep'; and he 'was banished by the paternal care of Lord Hammond, then omnipotent at the Foreign Office' from Paris, 'that city of delight', to what he regarded as 'a terrible and undeserved exile at Lisbon'.

His later ideal judgment, that

He who has once been happy is for aye  
Out of destruction's reach,

was not borne out by reality. He stood 'just at that parting of the ways in youth where a little sympathy, more or less, of a certain kind means a whole world of difference in its choice of a road—on this side to salvation, or that to perdition'. In

these circumstances, as chance had it, no post could have been better suited to him than Lisbon, for there he found Robert Lytton, afterwards Lord Lytton, known to many as the poet 'Owen Meredith'. His kindness proved at the moment Blunt's salvation.

## 4

Blunt and Robert Lytton had already met, in 1861, when Blunt, passing through Vienna *en route* from Constantinople, had called at the Embassy and found Lytton there as a young attaché. 'It was but a passing glimpse,' Blunt wrote after Lytton's death, 'but I like to recall it and the picture which remains in my mind of him as he sat writing, with one hand busy with his work, and his other caressing his black poodle's head. There was something typical in the attitude and the act.' Blunt arrived, however, at Lisbon, 'the mournfullest as well as the most beautiful of grass-grown cities', with no anticipation of renewed friendship or happiness of any sort.

In the burning heat of midsummer only the Chancery servant was at the Legation to welcome him to his new post. His one colleague, Mr. Lytton, was living in *villegiatura* at Cintra. So in a ramshackle hack carriage, Blunt set off to find him. Worn out and miserable, he fell asleep as they 'toiled up the dusty road in the afternoon to where Cintra lies perched beneath the eagle's nest of the Peña'. In the cool mist at the top of the pass sweet with the fresh smell of corkwoods dripping with rain he suddenly awoke relieved. The carriage had stopped at the door of a little country inn, kept by an ancient Welsh landlady, once bumboat woman to the fleet. Lytton ran out to greet him 'with that prodigality of affectionate kindness which was so great a charm in him'. And Blunt had hardly been half an hour with him before he felt that, 'like the pilgrim to the Delectable Mountains, the burden of my sins was falling from my back, and that I had found a guide and friend to show me the way out of my misfortunes'.

Blunt was in his 'most poetical phase—very unhappy and very desirous of being happy'—and not easily guided. 'I was', he explained long afterwards, 'constantly expecting a letter from a person to whom I was attached, which did not come, and I consoled myself with running about the hills with some young ladies or carousing on the Peña with Don Fernando and his unmarried spouse.'<sup>5</sup> In the quieter intervals the friendship with Lytton flourished and was steadying to him. Lytton, already an established poet himself, was quick to recognize Blunt's genius and to foster it. He recited and read aloud to Blunt, his favourite poets at that time, usually Browning or Victor Hugo. They spent mornings writing poetry together and sometimes afternoons deep in discussion as they wandered on donkey-back through the corkwoods.

'I rejoice to think that these delightful days, which were to me the first I had ever enjoyed with an intellect of the highest order—a kind of intellectual honeymoon—were but the prelude of a true and constant friendship, maintained unbroken between us till he died. Neither absence, nor growing age, nor diverging political opinions, were ever able to change it from the romance it was when it first began.'

Nor was the friendship at all one sided. Blunt had the rare gift of communicating to all who came into contact with him a sense of life and of heightening for them the significance of even the least and most ordinary of objects, feelings, ideas. Lytton appreciated this to the full. 'I hope you have not lost,' he wrote, 'and will never lose, any of your wondrous elasticity of life. . . . I long to bathe my sensations for a moment in the buoyancy of yours, as a tired traveller longs for a plunge in some fresh mountain pool.' But his affection for the younger man was founded solidly on the knowledge that, as he said years later, if he were ill or in any sort of difficulty, Blunt was the one among his many friends to whom he could turn with absolute assurance that help would be given him at whatever inconvenience to Blunt himself. He relied on him too in matters of taste and judgment feeling that Blunt's

'poet's nature' gave him an instinctive sense of fitness. Blunt seemed to him an artist in all things, not only in literature.

Soon after Blunt's departure from Lisbon at the end of the summer of 1865 Lytton wrote urging him to 'go on writing, and also reading and thinking for the sake of writing'. He anxiously preached the gospel of work. Matured though Blunt was beyond his years, Lytton knew by experience that it was 'a dangerous privilege and a strange responsibility' for a young man to be his own master. Blunt reminded him strongly of himself and he realized the lengths to which his 'very unsafe state of mind' might lead because he too at Blunt's age had been desperately unhappy. And his fears were justified. Blunt fell ill with despondency. For him 'the flower-pot of fate' seemed emptied out.

Gradually he pulled himself together and went back for a second term at Frankfort where he was again immersed in an atmosphere of religio-philosophic speculation.<sup>6</sup> The 'days of his utter night' were recalled to him and again his religious scruples arose. All his life he was to regret the loss of absolute faith. As an old man, in the character of Merlyn 'speaking aloud . . . to the heart of man', he said:

Cast not loose thy religion, whether believing or no.

Heavy it is with its rule, a burden laid on thy back, a  
sombre mask at the show.

Yet shall it cloak thee in days of storm, a shield when  
life's whirlwinds blow.

For three years now he had been 'without religion'; he had weathered the storm unshielded and, though neither unscathed nor without regret, was able to consider fresh doubts and fears from a more detached point of view than formerly. He had already started on that saner road along which his own conscience and no imposed doctrine, led him. Eight years later he had progressed far enough to write, "'Tis conscience makes us sinnèrs, not our sins'. In 1866 he was well on the

way to such an ironical appreciation of his position as he gives in a sonnet written six years later:

When I complained that I had lost my hope,  
Of life eternal with the eternal God. . . .  
Then I was told that pride had barred the way,  
And raised this foul rebellion in my head.  
Yet strange rebellion! I, but yesterday,  
Was God's own son in His own likeness bred,  
And thrice strange pride! Who thus am cast away  
And go forth lost and disinherited.

During this second term in Germany, therefore, his religious perplexities were no longer permitted to occupy his whole attention.

Frankfort was 'a place at that time of first diplomatic importance as capital of the Germanic confederation and seat of the diet'. Bismarck was at the outset of his career and recognized at Berlin as the leader of the Junker party. His policy had been in part adopted, though he himself was unpopular with old King Friedrich Wilhelm through whose efforts he had been replaced at Frankfort by his rival, Count d'Usedom. Both the Count, a leader of the Prussian Liberal party, and his wife, 'the good-natured Scotchwoman who figures in Bismarck's memoirs under the name of Olympia as his *bête noir*, the subject of his unsparing jests', welcomed Blunt into their circle. The young British attaché became a sort of child in the house of the Prussian Legation. The Usedomes were perhaps more outspoken than is common in diplomatic circles, and their frankness was useful to Blunt, teaching him something of Berlin policy and the hopes and fears of German patriotism.

At the British Embassy he was also in high favour. Lady Malet, who had sufficient perception to see in Bismarck, despite his unpopularity at Frankfort, the coming man of genius, provided Blunt with his one personal recollection of the great man. She invited him to tea with the future Chan-

cellor to whom she had said that the young Englishman had some faculty of verse. Bismarck 'talked pleasantly and well on literature and science in excellent English for a couple of hours, affecting a certain Anglomania, where he touched on politics'. He showed himself at his best and left Blunt 'with a feeling of the heroic such as a young man gives to one already beginning to be famous and who has been kind to him'.

Later, scanning his past life, as he was in the habit of doing, he thought that he might 'have risen to heights as a courtier' during this time at Frankfort had it not been that 'the special instinct of such semi-domestic service was wanting' in him, 'the audacity mixed with reverence royal personages expect of their servants'. Possibly 'the special instinct' was lacking because the royal personages were unattractive: 'The royal houses of Germany are a curious caste,' he wrote, 'phlegmatic, sensual, animal, almost childish. In their company I was constantly reminded of the inbred short-horned cattle we exhibit at our shows, high pedigreed ruminants bred to fatten, kindly and complete in their digestive organs but of no other interest, gazing wide-eyed on a world they believe to be made for them and whose realities they do not understand.'

Partly because of his dislike of this 'curious caste' and partly because of his personal unhappiness during his first period at Frankfort he left for South America late in 1867 with a firmly rooted aversion to Germans. In his mind were associated 'Death, Winter, the Germans and other repulsive assertions of power', and in a sonnet on the decay of the Turkish Empire, typified in the crumbling old fortress of Roumeli Hissar on the Bosphorus—a decay caused by the fact that 'close on barbarous power tread lust and indolence'—he wrote,

the very German boor,  
Who in his day of fortune moves our scorn,  
Purged of his slough, in after ages may  
Invite the tears of nations yet unborn.

## 5

At Buenos Aires in 1868 Blunt came under a more virile influence than any that he had yet encountered, that of the celebrated traveller and writer Richard Burton, afterwards Sir Richard Burton. 'Burton,' he wrote later, 'was at that time at the lowest point I fancy of his whole career, and in point of respectability at his very worst. His consular life at Santos, without any interesting work to his hand or proper vent for his energies, had thrown him into a habit of drinking of which he afterwards cured himself. He reminded me by turns of a black leopard, caged, but unforgiving, and again with his close-cut poll and iron frame of that wonderful creation of Balzac's, the *ex-galérien*, Vautrin, hiding his grim identity under an Abbé's cassock.'

While the young attaché listened Burton would talk late into the night of everything in Heaven and Earth 'till he grew dangerous in his cups, and revolver in hand would stagger home to bed'. According to his recitals he was guilty of every vice and had committed every crime. But their brutality, Blunt soon found, was more pretended than real, affected *pour épater le bourgeois*. 'Even the ferocity of his countenance gave place at times to more agreeable expressions, and I can just understand the infatuated fancy of his wife that in spite of his ugliness he was the most beautiful man alive.'

The extravagance of Burton's talk went a little to Blunt's head. Amorous exploits, such as had already chequered his career, became under Burton's influence more daring. There is a story current of his riding many miles over the hills on a dark evening to visit the wife of a ranchero, of the husband's unexpected return, and Blunt's flight through a back door. Incited by Burton's traveller's tales he made an expedition of some hardship on his own account across the wide-rolling pampas and through the Brazilian forests—

Where sky and earth itself are lost in insolent depths of  
green,



broken only by the sheen and glint of insect wings or the blazing flash of butterflies and bright birds.<sup>7</sup> But it was Burton's experiences in the East, especially in Arabia, that captured Blunt's imagination. He had been interested in Arabia ever since reading Palgrave's *Journeys*, had had a taste of the East at his first diplomatic posts, and was now enthralled by Burton's stories. They must have illuminated much in Arabia for him when he made his own journeys there ten years later, though his views on Eastern men and manners when he came to know them differed radically from Burton's.

Meanwhile it was probably as well that he should have been transferred early in the next year to a post in Switzerland,

the land of lakes and snow,  
And ancient freedom of ancestral type,  
And modern innkeepers who cringe and bow,  
And venal echoes, and Pans paid to pipe! . . .  
This is the birth place of all sentiment,  
The fount of modern tears.

The saner air of that humanly well-ordered country administered a cold douche after the strong wine of association with Burton and provided the anti-climax to his diplomatic career. Towards the end of 1869 he married Lady Anne Noel and resigned from the service.

## MARRIAGE, POETRY AND TRAVEL

## I

BLUNT's marriage<sup>1</sup> might have been ordained by an ironic providence prone to repeat its less fortunate experiments. Lady Anne Isabella King-Noel was the daughter of the first Earl of Lovelace and Ada, child of that ill-sorted pair, Byron and Anne Isabella Milbanke.<sup>2</sup> She and her younger brother, Ralph Lord Wentworth, had been brought up chiefly by their grandmother, Lady Byron.<sup>3</sup> From her they not only inherited many traits of character but also received most of their early training and impressions. Subtler, less domineering, and with no bent towards reforming others, Lady Anne was, in a measure, a second Lady Byron; and like her grandmother before her, she married a man of romantic beauty and temperament.

Her likeness to Lady Byron Blunt did not, perhaps, perceive at the time of his marriage, though her connection, as Byron's granddaughter, with the Byron legend undoubtedly attracted him. Besides, she was a very considerable heiress in her own right and she had the virtues enumerated in one of Blunt's early sonnets as those of the woman he would choose to love.<sup>4</sup> Her youthful integrity, her pure features, her clear sweet voice—Byron's voice—must have delighted him, no less than the high spirit that made her fearless and gave her, though a small woman delicately framed, remarkable endurance in face of hardship. With this went a devotion to duty and a sense of justice well-nigh inflexible. She was 'of the salt of the earth', Blunt wrote after her death, 'nobody was ever so entirely and naturally good as she was.'

For worldly pleasures she had little taste, but many of

Blunt's other interests she shared and largely financed. She was generous, as he was, and willing to toil for oppressed peoples—or peoples that she looked upon as oppressed—and like him she was extraordinarily fond of animals. They bred both Blenheim spaniels and, of far greater importance, Arab horses: the building up of the famous Crabbet Arabian stud owed as much to her energy as to his; and, if never a show rider, she was an unflagging horsewoman all her life and in her last years became completely absorbed in her horses. At the age of seventy-seven she is said to have thrown over the convention of a lifetime to ride astride. Nor was her interest in horses exclusively practical. Like Blunt she seized every opportunity to glean information about the history of the horse, compiling a mass of material on that much-debated subject, perhaps for the book that he always planned to write. Indeed her access to the foreign and particularly the Arabic literature of the subject was readier than Blunt's, since she was a much more accurate linguist.

With a mind as keen as Blunt's she had inherited from her mother, Byron's Ada, and from Lady Byron, a genuine love of learning. She had a student's zeal and patience unknown to Blunt. On the other hand she lacked the sympathy and imagination which often enabled him to grasp the drift of words spoken in an almost unknown tongue and somehow convey his meaning in reply. She had less, much less of course, of the temperament of the artist. Even her not inconsiderable artistic accomplishment sprang from intellectual effort rather than any spark of genius. She had an extensive knowledge of music and owned a fine collection of instruments, among them a superb Stradivarius listed among the best Stradivarii as 'the Blunt (1721)'. But in her performance there was little feeling: her playing gave pleasure to few besides herself and was torture to her husband, no music lover at best. Her sketches and water-colours, though often charming are too meticulously correct to be of great interest. In fact Lady Anne was something of a pedant.



LADY ANNE BLUNT



To those with whom she lived she seemed to be always preoccupied with minutiae, practical as well as intellectual—to lack a sense of proportion. The petty arrangements of daily life and travel distracted her. To others with whom she was on less intimate footing the restraint imposed by her high breeding, while it hid her uneasiness, made her appear shy and repressed. Of the deeper life that flowed securely beneath the surface worry and hurry and reticence, no one was aware. Even those who knew her best did not understand why Lady Anne, brought up by Lady Byron in no dogmatic religious belief determined suddenly in 1880 to become a Roman Catholic and to be received into the Church by Cardinal Manning. She had no evident interest in religion; her husband was not at the time a sufficiently ardent Roman Catholic to influence her. Not until thirty-seven years later, in a letter to Blunt written from Egypt shortly before her death describing a vision that had appeared to her at a time of great danger in Persia in 1879, did she offer any explanation of her conversion.

Lady Anne's adoration of her husband was single-hearted up to the time of her conversion. She went her own way, to be sure, but with the egoism of a wife who identifies herself with her husband, and looks upon his interest as her interest. He had the egoism of conscious power and the imagination that led him constantly to dramatize himself. But if he was thoughtless of her, overtaxing her strength on their journeys, she admitted no need for indulgence. And alien to her as was his attitude toward life and love—his belief that

Love is of body and body, the physical passion of joy  
    . . . . All else is a fraudulent toy,

and that there is

room enough beneath the sun  
For her, and thee and me —

she would probably have preferred always to ignore his infidelities. For many years the bitterness she felt was

expressed only in her diary. In 1883 she noted: 'Conversation about the hearts of poets—who have no hearts by the way as it all dissolves in vain words—a wound years ago remains a wound for ever for me poor woman of the earth as long as I live. But those who talk pass unscathed—I don't know which is more despicable. Why should any creature have power to wound another?'

But Blunt had his side. For a temperamental and imperious man his role was a difficult one. He must have realized the extent of Lady Anne's forbearance—

thou heapest coal  
Of fire upon my head the drear night long  
With thy forgiveness.

Her unimaginative goodness could not have been easy to live with; still less, her uncompromising precision and haunting sense of cheyving details. As she grew older, too, she became eccentric: in the East she had formed the habit of always covering her head; her maid coming in with her early morning tea would find her sitting up in bed wearing a little fishing hat and with a mackintosh gathered about her shoulders; and she often retired for the night at the surprising hour of six o'clock—oddities trying to a fastidious man though in themselves unimportant enough. But, however much Lady Anne may have irritated him, Blunt never ceased to admire her. To the very end he continued to respect and to have faith in her. And she, even after they had separated by their common wish, could never see him without again falling under his spell.

2

Immediately after his marriage on June 8th, 1869, the publication of Mrs. Beecher Stowe's revelations involved Blunt in the notorious problems of the Byron family. The summer

and autumn were spent in discussing the disclosures with Lady Anne and her brother, Ralph, then Lord Wentworth and later Earl of Lovelace, and what was to be done about them; in helping his wife to write letters both tactful and truthful about the situation; and in condensing a statement of Lady Byron's own view of the quarrel.

Before settling in Sussex he and Lady Anne lived for a time in Paris where they were caught up in the whirl of political events leading to the Franco-Prussian War. Their apartment in the Rue de Rivoli became a centre of news and gossip brought to it by Julie, their somewhat sardonic and very French *bonne*, as well as by Blunt himself and his friends, especially his cousin Francis Currie who was at that time his mentor. The Embassy, with which his pleasant personal relations with his successors kept him in touch, held to the belief that this was no war of government against government but of race against race: if Germany were beaten, France would recover; if Germany won, France would go the way of the other Latin nations—an eventuality unthinkable to the violently anti-Prussian Blunt.

Although he had no faith in the Emperor, to whom he had been presented at Biarritz and of whom he had learned much in Paris, he became an upholder of France so staunch that when most of the English colony fled from the capital he stayed on declaring Paris to be impregnable and carried on his usual life there, even the daily game of 'real' tennis at the Pavillon du Jeu de Paume in the Tuilleries gardens. Only when in August talk of a republic became violent and Paris was actually declared under siege could he bring himself to join Lady Anne whom he had sent with her cousin Alice Noel out of harm's way to Dieppe. After the battle of Sedan there was nothing to do but dispatch a huge box of biscuits to Julie to keep her through the siege, and return to England to take possession of Newbuildings Place, the small Jacobean house belonging to the Blunt estates near Southwater, ten miles from Crabbet, the seat of Francis Blunt.



At Newbuildings, in mid-November 1870, a son, named after his father, Wilfrid Scawen, was born who lived only four days. The birth not many years afterwards of a daughter, Judith Anne Dorothea, in whom Blunt took great pride, did not satisfy his longing for a son to be his companion and to maintain the family possessions and traditions. He never ceased to be haunted by the sense that his life without a male heir was warped and incomplete.

Early in 1871 the Blunts went out to Madeira to join Blunt's brother who was ill there with tuberculosis. After making a tour of the northern part of the island they left Francis and went to Spain. There, on a riding trip through the country, they were arrested as Carlists, and were in danger of being shot. But the Blunts' journeys were always made under a lucky star. They escaped and returned by way of Paris after the Commune to Newbuildings bringing with them an odd and indigent Irishman, the painter Molony, whom they had met in Spain. Molony lived with them for many years and was supported by them for many more. They liked his wit and they admired his paintings of which there are a number of examples still to be seen at Newbuildings and at Crabbet.

Toward the end of the year Blunt returned to Madeira, this time to nurse his sister as well as his brother. Alice had accompanied Blunt when he went out to South America in 1868 as an attaché. There she became engaged to William Frank Wheatley of Ashurst Farm, Sussex, and to Blunt's regret, was married to him in June 1869, eight days after his own marriage. Now in 1872 Alice was with her brother Francis and like him desperately ill.

In the spring Blunt brought them both to England. Alice lived into the summer; Francis died at Southampton at the end of April and was buried in Franciscan robes at Crawley in the church of the monastery that he had founded.<sup>5</sup> Blunt was far too loyal to his brother to see in this stroke of destiny anything but fruitless waste and grief. He had not only loved

Francis but had trusted him profoundly. 'Thy ways were not my ways,' he wrote, 'thy life was peace.'

And mine has been a battle. . . .  
Thou wert a brave, just man, whom all men knew  
And trusted, and some loved, and thou to me  
Wert as a tower of strength, a sanctuary  
To which I fled from the world's maddened crew,  
Wounded by me, and there with bloodstained hands  
Clung to the altar of thy innocence.

He would gladly have forgone the inheritance that fell to his lot on Francis's death, finding comfort, he wrote, only in

thinking that perhaps some happy day  
We yet may walk together, and devise  
Of the old lands we loved, in Paradise,  
And I shall give account, as best I may,  
How I thy tenant was awhile for thee.

But destiny seems sometimes peculiarly intelligent in the treatment of her subjects, for of all the roles he played, only in that of squire was Blunt to feel himself completely successful.

From sketches made during his brother's illness and from his own hands and feet, which like his brother's were slender and finely formed, Blunt modelled in clay a recumbent figure of Francis in friar's habit and carved it in English alabaster. The tomb lies now in a side chapel of the ugly little church of the Crawley fathers.<sup>6</sup> The figure, impressive in its repose and grace and purity of line, gives the measure of Blunt's sincerity as brother and as artist. It was his one work in sculpture, and a noble *tour de force*.

The sonnets entitled *In Anniversario Mortis* which he wrote four years later in his brother's memory are a less brilliant piece of work than the sculptured figure, but the first three have a tender simplicity and the last one, a restraint that is touching.

After Francis's death the Blunts let Newbuildings to the

Hungerford Pollens: Mrs. Pollen was one of the Laprimaudaye sisters with whom Blunt had kept up the friendship of his childhood in Italy and of whom he was to see much in the next years. The Blunts themselves moved to Crabbet. But Crabbet at this time was small and insignificant and quite unsuited to their way of life. With the aid of a Georgian classic model they drew plans to rebuild it, improving and amending as they progressed but working always on the basis of tradition. The house is an example of the way in which they worked together. The artistic conception and main design were undoubtedly Blunt's, the painstaking details and the drawing to scale Lady Anne's. Following his theory that a house should appear to have been built not by a professional architect but by its proprietor, in harmony with his life and its surroundings, Blunt contracted for floor by floor with the local builder and watched each brick and stone as it was laid. Domestic convenience he ignored: the great hall and the rooms were well-proportioned but, though they had doors opening on to the lawn, often there were none opening from room to room, and the only means of mounting to the upper story was by the little roundabout stairway belonging to the old house. Outwardly, however, the result was most satisfactory, beautiful in its proportions and in its simplicity.<sup>7</sup>

As soon as the house was done, in April 1873, they were off again for Belgrade and Constantinople. Lady Anne had never been to the Levant, Blunt had already felt its charm, and the adventures of *Childe Harold* urged them on.

At Constantinople they were drawn immediately into the agreeable life of the diplomatic circle but the change of climate soon took its toll and Blunt, in only indifferent health when they left England, came down with a sharp attack of pneumonia. That crisis over, the doctors pronounced him to be suffering from galloping consumption. They gave him only a few weeks to live. With the high spirit characteristic of him he determined to enjoy the little time left him. Scarcely able to get about, he went to the At-Maidan, the great horse market

of Istambul, bought half a dozen pack horses, gathered together supplies, and accompanied by the usual semi-military escort and an Armenian dragoman, crossed with Lady Anne to Scutari. Thence they started on six summer weeks of pleasant wandering. One of Blunt's lungs hardened and ceased to be of any use for the rest of his life, but the other, though not whole, did the work of four ordinary lungs.

Needless to say they left the beaten tracks of tourists and journeyed whither fancy and the advice of those they met along the road directed. Their interest now and always was less in the ancient monuments and natural beauties of the land in which they travelled than in its inhabitants and their manner of living. They made a point of talking with the peasants as much as was possible through their dragoman interpreter, returning from their journey with strong impressions that they later proved to their own satisfaction to be just. In common with most Englishmen in 1873 they sympathized with the Turks rather than with the Christians of the Ottoman Empire; and like most travellers in Asia Minor, they were impressed with the 'honest goodness' of the inhabitants of Turkey and the badness of their government.

Obviously the peasants were oppressed by taxation and unjust fiscal demands. They complained of hardships imposed by the government and looked upon the Blunts with envy as the subjects of an Empire wherein everyone was free and unoppressed. Yet the method of government had a good deal to be said for it: the poor were not persecuted and personal freedom existed as it does not in better regulated lands. The liberty enjoyed in a tyrannically misgoverned country was sufficiently paradoxical to appeal to Blunt and gave rise to bitter reflection—the earliest that, later, he could remember making with regard to Eastern countries.

This awakening suspicion that the East had something to teach in the way of government was intensified by the Blunts' experience in Algeria early in the following year when they rode over the great Halfa desert, visiting the oases between

Laghouat and Biskra in the French Sahara. In the towns they found the Mohammedan natives oppressed by the civil administration of the Christians who had conquered them in the uprising after the Prussian War and confiscated their property. The natives were now living like the foreign settlers in an 'ignoble squalor' repellent to the Blunts. The Arabs in the Sahara beyond the Atlas, on the other hand, whose vigorous way of life the French military officers esteemed, had been allowed to retain their wealth and much of their ancient pride. The Blunts, travelling with an Armenian Christian interpreter who despised the Arabs and a French-speaking Spahi guide 'who browbeat and affronted them', made no friends among them—nor did they at that time particularly want to. But the patriarchal life of the desert Arabs among camel herds and horses and memories of heroic deeds charmed Blunt. To his ardent imagination it seemed noble and free and to be threatened by the greed of 'civilized' society to which the town dwellers had already succumbed. The corrupting effect of Western civilization upon Mohammedan natives 'was a new political lesson', he wrote years later, 'which I took to heart, though still regarding it as in no sense my personal affair'.<sup>8</sup>

## 3

Before Blunt took the next important step in his political education a year of travel in France and Italy intervened which he devoted to interests far removed from problems of national government and especially to poetry. He not only wrote many poems at this time, such as the sonnets to Juliet, but, in response to Lytton's urging and Mrs. Pollen's encouragement, prepared his poems for a first publication. Mrs. Pollen herself was something of a poet—the series entitled 'A Woman's Sonnets' among Blunt's collected poems was probably written by her—and so, like Lytton, is an influence to be reckoned with in Blunt's poetry.

The small yellow volume of *Songs and Sonnets by Proteus* that appeared in 1875 had gilded on its cover the sun's face and rays with the inscription 'By thy light I live'. The device, repeated on later collections of Blunt's poems, is appropriate to verse remarkable for naturalness and strength of expression. It is true that the narratives and allegories, written mainly in the early 'sixties, and the songs are often sentimental and derivative. The song at the end of 'A Rhapsody', exquisite as it is, echoes the Indian maid's song in *Endymion*. 'Pictures on Enamel' bears the stamp of Victorian romance—the very names Astraled, Somandalin, give it away; and 'Recollections of Childhood' escapes only here and there from Victorian sweet-prettness. But in all the longer poems passages of fresh observation speak with Blunt's authentic voice, the voice of the sonnets.

Blunt's sonnets have the vitality of things grown out-of-doors in full daylight with no suggestion of literary forcing about them. They spring directly from strong feeling as in the exigent

Give me thy heart, Juliet, give me thy heart!  
I have a need of it, an absolute need,  
Because my own heart has thus long been dead.  
I live but by thy life. The very smart  
Of this new pain which has been born of thee  
Is thine, thy own great pleasure's counterpart.

The simple abrupt speech enforcing the sincerity of the emotion is characteristic, even to the bad rhymes 'need' and 'dead'. Such he would admit occasionally as well as doubtful syntax if thereby he could express himself more honestly. For the same reason he experimented with the sonnet form, adding lines, varying the rhyme scheme and substituting assonance for rhyme. Fortunately his poetic talent equalled his zeal for truth. Ease and grace of style were native to him. Often, as in the lovely line

Clear as the pale green edge where dawn began,

his pen seems to write for him. But he can be ingenious when he wants to arrest attention, as in the figure of youth's thoughts

Cutting the horizon of experience  
Sharp as an obelisk,

or rise to grandeur—

This is the sublime  
To be alone with eagles in the air—

or express bitter passion by sound as significant as the image itself:

We planted love, and lo it bred a brood  
Of lusts and vanities and senseless joys.

The rich experience behind his sonnets, Blunt maintained, gave them their ultimate value, a philosophy derived not from the closet but straight from life. Man's salvation, in his view, was to live intensely, to obey his instinct, to seize pleasure when it comes—

pleasure which was so divine a thing  
The sweetest and most strange to understand.

Pleasure to Blunt is love. It waits but for a moment

As though a wild bird suddenly should stay  
A moment at our side and we should find,  
When we looked up, that it had taken wings,

but on it depends the sweetness of memory the only thing that makes age tolerable. And, just as 'love in pain is sweetest love', so the memory of pleasure is most poignant if love has been cut off at fullest bloom, not tinged with death in gradual fading.

I should have slain my love in its full pride,  
So had it lived and been forever mine,  
A treasure for all time to ponder on,

Laid up for aye in old Time's palaces,  
A 'thing of beauty', which my soul had won,  
And death had made undying with a kiss.

Death, impending fate, the passing of time haunt Blunt's thoughts.

It may be, for a little space of years  
We conquer fate and half forget our tears.

Then youth vanishes and 'doubts beset us', old age is upon us, 'the Gaul is at the gate': all that man has been and dreamed of being must die. Were this not so he would long since have become God Himself for he has power over everything in the universe except death. Death makes a mockery of life—'O who would live again to suffer loss?'

Time is more to Blunt than a rhetorical theme. Its power is the key to his attitude towards life and is summed up in one of his finest sonnets:

I long have had a quarrel set with Time  
Because he robbed me. Every day of life  
Was wrested from me after bitter strife.  
I never yet could see the sun go down  
But I was angry in my heart, nor hear  
The leaves fall in the wind without a tear  
Over the dying summer. I have known  
No truce with Time nor, Time's accomplice, Death.  
The fair world is the witness of a crime  
Repeated every hour. For life and breath  
Are sweet to all who live; and bitterly  
The voices of these robbers of the heath  
Sound in each ear and chill the passer-by.  
—What have we done to thee, thou monstrous Time?  
What have we done to Death that we must die?

## 4

The next six years of Blunt's life contributed step by step



to the growth of his political creed. By the end of that time it was fully defined.

In the winter of 1875-6 the Blunts paid their first visit to Egypt, a visit seemingly of no greater moment than others, yet marking the first step in the connection that was later to be so close and so important both to Blunt and to Egypt. The Egyptian-Abyssinian campaign then in progress prevented their following out of their first plan of entering from the south by way of Suakim, Kassala and the Blue Hills and of working their way northwards to Cairo in the spring. Determined not to approach Egypt in the normal fashion, from Alexandria, they gathered together the camping equipment prepared for the longer trip, landed at Suez, hired camels and Bedouin camelmen, and took the old caravan route to Cairo. Now that the old route has been made into a much-frequented automobile road their journey seems singularly unadventurous, but at the time it was less often travelled. Their impressions had the advantage of comparative freshness.

Five days with the camelmen gave them their first practical lessons in Arabic and laid the basis for relations that were later to become so pleasant and so intimate with the Arabian desert tribes. On the fifth morning they entered Cairo and made camp at Abasiyeh, all unknowingly behind the targets of the troops. Little did they think, when bullets of soldiers at target practice began surprisingly to whistle past them and they discovered the mistake they had made, that they would ever be interested in those Egyptian soldiers as a fighting army.

In Cairo they stopped only one day, pressing on over the Kasr-el-Nil bridge towards the Pyramids, forcing the camelmen to 'break the tribal rule which forbade them as Bedouins of the Eastern desert to cross over to the West'—an injustice which they did not fully understand or repent of till much later. They camped close to 'the little fellah village of Tolbiya, the last but one before the Pyramids are reached'. The villagers, accustomed to regard Frankish travellers only as their prey, were obliged to accord hospitality to the Blunts who had

alighted for the night as guests, for the Bedouin law of hospitality is exacting. These enforced friendly relations served as an introduction to other villages which the Blunts managed to visit despite the fact that their camelmen refused to penetrate further into the Western desert.

The villagers talked openly with the Blunts. They looked on the English as friends, as more honest and politically disinterested than other Franks, and welcomed the rumour of a possible intervention in the government by the English. 'They did not suspect,' Blunt wrote years later, 'the immense commercial selfishness which led us, collectively as a nation, to so many aggressions on the weak races of the world.' Nor did Blunt himself at that time suspect it; the bitterness of tone is of later growth. 'I was as yet,' he admitted, 'though not perhaps even then enthusiastically so, a believer in the common English creed that England had a providential mission in the East, and that our wars were only waged there for honest and beneficent reasons. Nothing was further from my mind than that we English ever could be guilty, as a nation, of a great betrayal of justice in arms for our mere selfish interests . . . I had no other thought for the Egyptians than that they should share with India, which I had not yet seen, the privilege of our protection.'

Indeed, there was need of protection of some sort. The fellahin were in dire poverty in this first of the three last years of the Khedive Ismaïl's reign. European bondholders were clamouring for their coupons: taxpayers down to the poorest were squeezed; in the country even the sheykhs had few of them a respectable cloak to wear; and in the provincial towns on market-days the place was full of women selling clothes and silver ornaments to Greek usurers to get money to pay the tax collectors. Blunt 'bought their poor trinkets and listened to their stories, and joined them in their maledictions on a government which was laying them bare'. With Wordsworthian faith he believed in the nobility and sincerity of those near the land; the fellahin, moreover, were oppressed by

foreign tyrants. He could not but hope that the better government of which they were worthy would come. It had not occurred to him as yet that he himself could do anything to bring it about.

Returning to Cairo in March 1876, they found Cave's financial mission arrived and established. From its members—among whom were Blunt's old acquaintances Vivian Buckley of the Foreign Office, and Sir Rivers Wilson—and from the British Consul General, Colonel Staunton, they learned something of the condition of financial affairs and something of the state of government.

Blunt's last memory of that winter at Cairo was of a barbarically gorgeous banquet given by the Viceroy Ismail to the head of the financial mission, Mr. Cave, later Sir Stephen Cave, in the Viceregal kiosque which still mars the desert at the foot of the Great Pyramid. The financial brunt of the feast fell upon the taxpayer, the fellahin; yet Cave, the commissioner of a foreign race, in whose honour the feast had been made, was there only to save the fellahin from ruin. Not until years afterwards did Blunt recognize in this paradox twin causes of revolution.

With the return of spring came the necessity of going north out of the heat of Cairo. Blunt and Lady Anne set forth with their camels and tents and Bedouins across the Suez Canal, through the Sinai Peninsula and on by Akabah to Jerusalem—their first visit to 'the confines of Arabia' and their first glimpse of Mount Sinai of which Blunt wrote years later:

The rock of Horeb is the holiest place  
Of all earth's holies. In the wilderness  
It stands with its gaunt head bare to the heaven  
As when God spake with Moses face to face.

Red in the eternal sunset of the years,  
Crowned with a glory the world's evening wears,  
Where evening is with morning a first day  
Unchanged in the mute music of the spheres.

From base to top the boulder crags high thrown  
Fortress the plain which Israel camped upon,  
A living presence in the unliving waste,  
A couchant lion with a mane of stone.

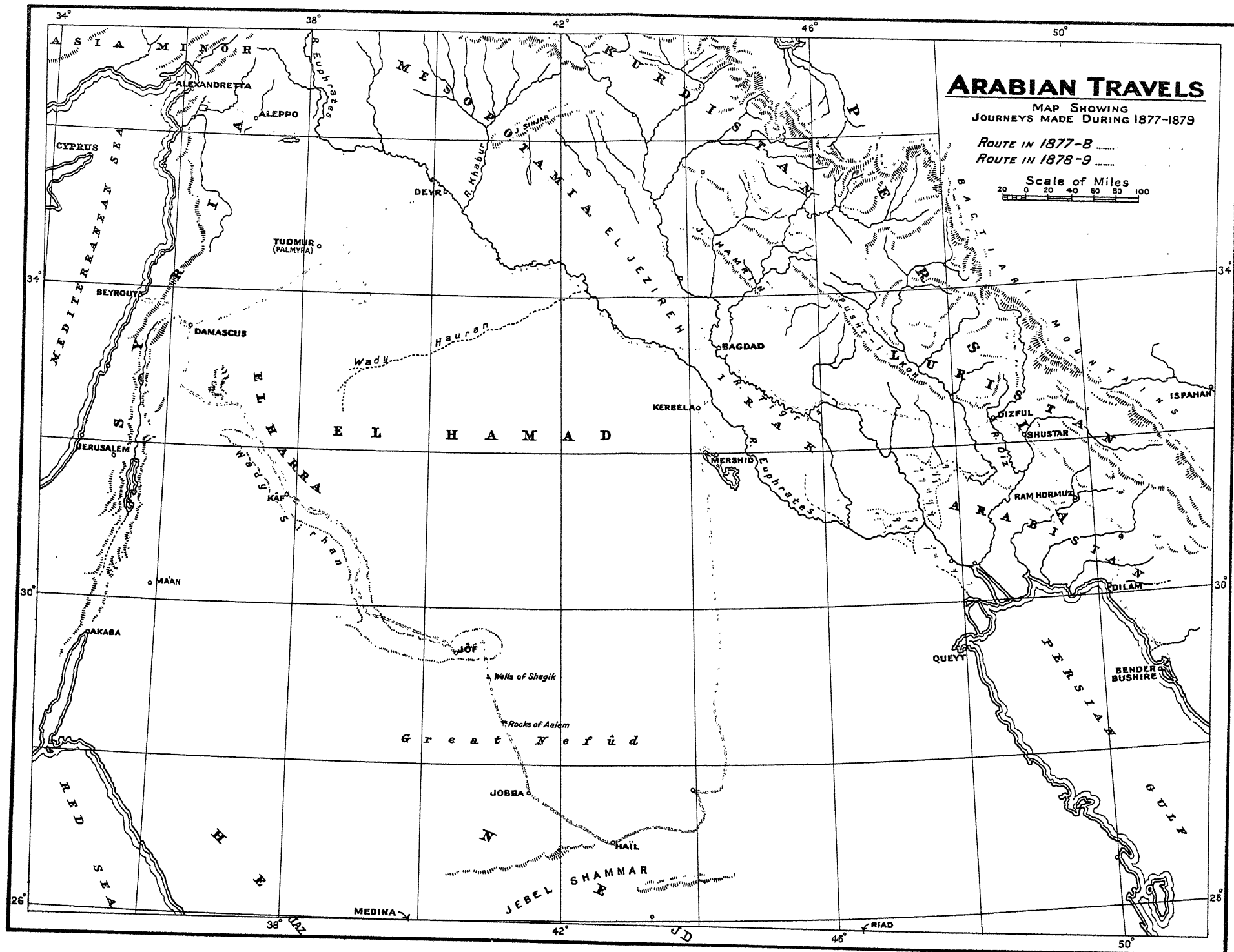
It was customary then for tourists to go from Egypt to Syria by desert instead of by sea route. It was very unusual, however, for those unable to speak the language to travel without a dragoman. As a result of such temerity the Blunts encountered perilous adventures. Through ignorance of Arab customs they offended a sheykh outside Akabah so bitterly that they were refused escort and guides. Their sole supporters were their camel-drivers, two Arab boys from Sinai who knew almost nothing of the northern country. For several days they ran short of water, being totally ignorant of where the wells lay. When, in the nick of time, they stumbled by sheer good luck upon a well, in their eagerness to drink they lost their heads and rushed for the water forgetting that strict Bedouin custom demanded that they ask permission of the Arabs already encamped there. Fortunately they succeeded in patching up the quarrel which had threatened to become dangerous and in reaching a tribe of Arabs friendly with their two camel-men. With them they encamped for some days and Blunt first became really interested in the Arabs as individuals. A Bedouin youth confided to him his love affairs. He persuaded Blunt to write a letter for him declaring that he would die if the father of the girl whom he loved refused to give her for the three camels he offered. Blunt 'began to suspect that these wild people were men with like passions with ourselves'. When he parted from the camel-drivers at Jerusalem he entrusted them with the task of taking his camels back to Cairo and of selling them there for him. Six months later he received the full price. It was brought home to him that 'some Arabs at least were as honest men as ourselves'.

On their way home to England early in the summer Blunt recalled their thirsty march through the desert, and the bliss

of coming suddenly upon a well, in the sonnet, 'The Oasis of Sidi Khaled':

How the earth burns! Each pebble underfoot  
Is as a living thing with power to wound.  
The white sand quivers, and the footfall mute  
Of the slow camels strikes but gives no sound,  
As though they walked on flame, not solid ground.  
'Tis noon, and the beasts' shadows even have fled  
Back to their feet, and there is fire around  
And fire beneath, and overhead the sun.  
Pitiful heaven! What is this we view?  
Tall trees, a river, pools, where swallows fly,  
Thickets of oleander where doves coo,  
Shades, deep as midnight, greenness for tired eyes.  
Hark, how the light winds in the palm-tops sigh.  
Oh this is rest. Oh this is paradise.





## IN THE EUPHRATES VALLEY

## I

THE Blunts had returned from Arabia dissatisfied with the superficiality of their experience there. They determined to make another journey in the following winter, 1877-8, that would give them a fuller knowledge of the Arabic language and customs and of the workings of the Eastern mind. But when they tried to prepare for it, no one could tell them how to reach their objective, Central Arabia. At the Royal Geographical Society there were no maps later than Colonel Chesney's of 1837; and no information was to be had about routes and methods. They were advised to see Sir Henry Layard. He suggested their taking a comfortable steamer from the point on the Euphrates nearest Aleppo to Bagdad—Cook's Tourist Agency would tell them the exact route. The Euphrates valley caravan road was dangerous, he said; and he warned them against the effects of the Turko-Bulgarian war then raging. Armenia was reported to be full of lawless disbanded troops and its soldiers and policemen all away at the war.

But Cook's Agency, they found, knew nothing of river steamers, comfortable or otherwise, to Bagdad. No one knew anything definite. Undismayed, Blunt affirmed that the sensational tales were all nonsense, that Aleppo was not in Armenia, and that the last place a beaten army would retreat to would be the Syrian desert. He added, moreover, that if plague existed in Bagdad so did small-pox in London. Lady Anne, swept on by his enthusiasm, agreed; and, as it happened, the moment for such a journey turned out to be really



very good: the Syrians hailed the absence of police and soldiers as a blessing and their Turkish governors, in misfortune, were ready to be friendly with anyone.

Taking ship from Marseilles, the Blunts landed at Alexandria and provided themselves with Hajji Mahmoud, a fat Syrian, as *cavass*, and with the necessary supplies and horses to take them on to Aleppo. Wrapped in heavy Bedouin cloaks and headgear they struggled through the freezing winter rains, warming themselves around the fire with other travellers, commercial Syrians and lean Arabs and young men off to the war in the crowded, noisy, vermin-cat-and-chicken ridden Khans; rolling up, dog-tired, on their appointed space of wooden sleeping platform; off at cock crow for another battle through the mud. Four days of this and they arrived thankfully at the comparative luxury of the British Consulate at Aleppo.

For a month or more torrential rains held them fast bound. Most travellers would have passed the time in sight-seeing; not so the Blunts. They could hardly persuade themselves to visit even the citadel, but they took great interest in a visit to the gaol and gave a 'few pennies' to the prisoner who had been there longest—a man of singularly unattractive appearance. The officials seemed offended and Blunt explained their intention to be merely charitable. 'That is very well,' replied the governor, 'and I perfectly understand your feeling; but it should have been a piece of gold, not silver. A crown piece was unworthy a gentleman of the Bey's distinction.' The Blunts were learning the etiquette of the East.

In the event the delay at Aleppo proved to be of great advantage, for the British Consul, Skene, a courageous and adventurous traveller himself, had lived thirty years in Arabia, and few places or tribes in the desert west of the Euphrates were unknown to him.<sup>1</sup> His practical experience of the Bedouins seems to have confirmed the romantic impression of them that Blunt had obtained in his travels of the preceding year and that he expressed in a sonnet written at Christmas at Aleppo:

Yours is the rain and sunshine, and the way  
Of an old wisdom by our world forgot,  
The courage of a day which knew not death.  
Well may we sons of Japhet in dismay  
Pause in our vain mad fight for life and breath  
Beholding you. I bow and reason not.

It was owing to Skene's help and information that the Blunts were able to fulfil their wish to visit the desert tribes. He told them of the Shammar who inhabited the desert of Mesopotamia and whom he did not know personally; and of the Anazeh who had their summer quarters to the west of the Euphrates and with whose tribes and sheykhs he was on friendly terms. In the winter they migrated southward to somewhere in the region of Jebel Shammar and Nejd, exactly where was not known.

Encouraged by Skene who said it would not be dangerous or difficult, if they had enough fortitude and patience to put up with the hardships of desert life and the slow progress of Bedouins on the march, the Blunts decided to join the Anazeh who were still in their summer quarters and march southwards with them. A desert hero of great war fame, Jedaan, sheykh of the Sebaa, a tribe of the Anazeh, loomed large in the Consul's tales. The picturesque deeds of this Rob Roy of the desert caught the Blunts' imagination. With Skene's promise of an introduction to him they expanded their first meagre plan of going down the river to Bagdad into the wider scheme of a systematic progress through the Bedouin tribes beginning with a visit to Jedaan. He and his tribes were said to be somewhere near Deyr, a small town on the Euphrates caravan route.

While the rains fell, plans were laid with the Consul to start as soon as possible. Blunt again hired Hajji Mahmoud, who had brought them with his mules from Alexandretta, to serve until they should reach the tribes and would need camels for actual desert work; engaged as cook an excitable little Chris-

tian, Hanna, much given to tears but courageous and faithful; and at the market purchased mares for Lady Anne and himself to ride. Lady Anne with the help of three Hebrews manufactured a tent according to a pattern already tested by the Blunts, and freshly stuffed the saddles. Bullets were run from the moulds in extra number since if fighting were to take place while they were with Jedaan, Blunt would be expected to take his share; and supplies were bought including cloaks and boots, sugar and tobacco to be used as gifts to the Bedouin sheykhs. By the end of December, when the rains ceased, everything was ready, and on January 9th the party, accompanied by Skene who had agreed to go with them as far as Deyr, set off.

At Deyr they were delayed day after day by the polite attentions of the Turkish Governor, Huseyn Pasha, who hoped by loading them with civilities to prevent them from joining Jedaan as they wished. The policy of the Turkish government was to keep the Bedouins, of whose intrigues it was always jealous, as ignorant as children of all that was passing in the outer world, and to sow dissension among them. It held to the old effective 'divide and rule'. Moreover, what could be more likely than that England, who was known to have her eye on the Euphrates in the event of a Bulgarian victory, should have sent the Blunts to spy out the land? Undoubtedly a British Consul had political motives for accompanying them so far from his post. So they were held in honourable captivity, given a guard of honour to attend them everywhere and warned against *ghazûs* or raiding parties.

They were bored. Even the nearby Euphrates lost its dignity at Deyr and the town itself, embellished by an enterprising pasha, was 'a grotesque imitation of a European *faubourg*'. But it was a well-known horse market where not only some of the best blood in Asia could be seen but a guarantee of authenticity could be procured as was not possible in ordinary circumstances at Damascus and Aleppo. They amused themselves, as they did wherever they went, by

examining the horses and making judicious purchases. Notwithstanding, the restricted town life fretted them, Blunt especially. They welcomed any excitement—news of raids and, as an adventure, a fall of Lady Anne's with her horse into a deep pit in the street. Finally, with the proviso that they would go direct to Bagdad and make no effort to reach Jedaan, they were allowed to depart. Skene, promising to meet them on their return to Deyr about March 15th, returned to Aleppo. The Blunts, in company with a caravan of mules and horses carrying bales of cotton and two Turkish ladies penned up like fowls in an immense pair of panniers that lurched along like a ship at sea, started for Bagdad.

## 2

For a little more than a fortnight they travelled through the river marshes and tamarisk woods, and across the dry wady Hauran. Blunt must have remembered these days later when making his 'Translations from the Arabic':

I climbed down from my watch tower of the rocks  
To where the tamarisks grow, and the dwarf palms. . . .  
I sought them in the foldings of the hill,  
In the deep hollows shut with rocks, where no winds blow;  
I sought their footstep under the tall cliffs,  
Shut from the storms, where the first lambs are born.

Along the old caravan route they met few Bedouins. The Arabs with whom they had to do were half shepherd, half ploughmen—fellahin Arabs—not the independent brave fellows whom they wished to find. The villagers with whom they became acquainted occasionally gave them eggs and ewes' milk to vary their desert fare and pressed them to stay in the villages. But however windy and bitter the night—and it was cuttingly cold, snowy even for a short time—and however forbiddingly the jackals and wolves might howl, Blunt insisted

on camping in their own tent whenever possible. He preferred its cleanliness and comparative quiet to communal life in the hovels of small village sheykhs, and for the animals grazing in the open.

On arriving at Bagdad the Blunts' first thought was how to get out of it. The British Residency itself where they stayed was delightful—an old house built around two large courtyards and furnished in the elaborate taste of eighteenth-century Persia except for the dining-room which, in deference to Anglo-Indian prejudice, was kept as studiously English as if it had been done by Maple. From its terrace overlooking the river an alley of old orange trees led through the cool and shabby garden to a little kiosk and the Residency quay. The town however, owing chiefly to loss of trade, plague, and the 'modern improvements'—including the razing of the city walls—instituted by Midhat Pasha whose acquaintance they were to make the following year, had been shorn of all its ancient glory.

The Blunts employed themselves as at Deyr and Aleppo in examining the horses that the town had to offer and in preparing for their further travels. They restocked their supplies, purchased four fine young camels, a *delûl* or she dromedary, and a white ass for Hanna's gratification; and they hired two honest camelmen and a fat *cavass* who had to be helped onto his horse and proved a most impractical traveller though good humoured and willing to do his duty.

Colonel Nixon, the British Resident, gave them much valuable information; and the English doctor took them to call on his friend, the dispossessed and pensioned King of Oude, an old Indian Nawab remarkable for his birth, his wealth, and the dignity of his private character. With him the Blunts made fast friends. He was agreeable and witty and understood European as well as Eastern thought, for he had travelled much and was a philosopher. Though his way of life was simple, his position at Bagdad was great—a combination sympathetic to Blunt's aristocratic inclinations. All the more

important Bedouin sheykhs were well known to him and he offered to give the Blunts letters to a number of them. He also invited the Blunts to make one of his country houses the starting-point of their journey, so that they could leave Bagdad unbeknownst to the Valy who, like the Pasha of Deyr, was bound to do his best to prevent them from visiting the tribes.

At the end of a fortnight, taking advantage of the Nawab's offer, they started on the second lap of their journey. Blunt, Lady Anne wrote, was 'perfectly happy, being once more "in his own tent", and having, besides, his own camels and his own servants, and no guards or policemen to vex him'. He at any rate 'felt quite at home in the desert'. Lady Anne, on her side, was less confident, for the more dangerous part of their march lay still before them and they had no guide. Mesopotamia, she wrote, 'at least this part of it, has never, as far as I know, been crossed by a European in its whole breadth, or in modern times even by a townsman from Bagdad or Aleppo; and the desert south of the Sinjar hills is quite new ground'.

## 3

Their journey to the desert where the Shammar and subsidiary Bedouin tribes were encamped, led then north-north-west across a desolate plain cut by the mounds of ancient Babylonian canals and inhabited only by gazelles and birds of prey. Travellers whom they met tried to turn them back, misguided and misdirected them, their servants were terrified, but they persevered. Blunt was happy. He was now to know the Bedouins in their own black tents, to live the life of the desert himself. From the ponds and brushwood he brought to bag geese and ducks and francolins and even wild boar; and he learned to grub up desert truffles (*kemeyeh*) with which Hanna varied their meagre fare of dates and bread.

At last they came to a great Bedouin encampment. The

sheykh, the first true Bedouin sheykh encountered by them, had a rollicking devil-may-care way of looking and talking. He feasted them on an abominably bad meal of boiled unseasoned sheep and black coffee. Blunt felt rather shy on this first visit to the tents, arriving as a stranger and unannounced, but following the procedure which Skene had told him was proper to such occasions he carried it off gallantly.

By this time—though Blunt himself never became as proficient as Lady Anne—they had learned to speak Arabic well enough to carry on a conversation with fair ease. Wisely they had adopted a dress that was a mixture of Arabian and European. A wholly Bedouin dress would have cost them the prestige of a strange nationality. Over their English clothes they wore Bedouin cloaks to protect them against rain and sun and on their heads the coiled turban that fellah Arabs wear and that was more useful than the Bedouin *kefiyeh* or scarf. It could be turned into a pillow, or unwound as a girdle or rope, or torn up into a bandage. Altogether they presented an appearance not unsuited to desert travelling. Lady Anne's side-saddle seemed to the Arabs merely a *shedád* or *delál's* saddle quixotically placed on a mare. Her skill in horsemanship and practical arts and her courage made her easily acceptable. Blunt, tall and aquiline, intensely alive but bearing himself with the haughty dignity of their own sheykhs, they recognized as one to revere. Doubtless his magnetism and his beauty—he reminded one, his friends say, of a fine arab horse with his look of sensitive high spirit and breeding—cast its spell upon them as upon other men. His courage and his horsemanship won their admiration and, more than all, his shooting. His ready acceptance of their manners and customs and his quick sympathy gave them personal confidence in him.

He in his turn sincerely admired their independence, 'their dignified simplicity' and high spirit. He, who was so impatient of his English peers, was tolerance itself toward the Bedouins; for they lived, it seemed to him, up to their own standards, making no pretences and with little material prosperity to aid

them. Having found that 'a soft word with them or still better a merry one' turned away their wrath, he managed them with a light hand. Though they were 'unwise in the world's learning', he felt that they had

gleams  
Of subtler instinct than the vain world deems,  
Glimpses of faiths transmitted from afar  
In signs and wonders and revealed in dreams.

And the willingness he showed to learn from them, persuaded them to pass on to him their practical lore.

They taught me their strange knowledge, how to read  
The forms celestial ordered to Man's need,  
To count on sand the arrow heads of fate  
And mark the birds' flight and the grey hare's speed.

It was knowledge that proved invaluable to him on many a future expedition.

As they went across the desert from sheykh to sheykh the Blunts realized that the person whom they would be most interested in seeing was Faris, one of the two rival sheykh of the Shammar tribe. To reach him was no easy matter; but when, finally, they succeeded they found in him what they had 'been looking for, but hardly hoped to get a sight of, a *gentleman* of the desert', perfectly well bred, frank and cordial. He was twenty-seven years old, small, lithe and graceful, his complexion not darker than that of a Spaniard and his features typically Arabian: an aquiline nose, black eyebrows almost meeting across his forehead, and eyes fringed round with long black lashes. His smile was peculiarly sweet. But it was his manner toward his people, that of the true aristocrat, which won Blunt's heart. He was respectful to the old and unpretending with his equals among whom his personal qualities gave him so much ascendancy that he could afford to be familiar without losing his dignity. As a result his tribe adored him.



With other Bedouins the Blunts' relations had been friendly; with Faris they quickly became affectionate. Blunt and Faris swore the oath of brotherhood: 'they took hold of each other by the girdle with their left hands,' Lady Anne wrote, 'and, holding their right hands as appealing to heaven, they repeated the prescribed form of words very seriously, for this is a pledge no Bedouin ever takes lightly. . . . This pledge of brotherhood, once taken, cannot be dissolved. It binds the swearers to be henceforth brothers, as though born of the same mother, in all things except that it is no bar to marriage of the one with near relations of the other. Personal combat is henceforth not allowed, even if the tribes of the two brothers should afterwards be at war; nor can the property of a brother be seized by the brother or by any of his people. The swearers have, on the contrary, a right to aid and assistance in case of need; and a brother, if called upon is bound to avenge his brother's quarrel.'

'There was something so impressive in the ceremony that, for some minutes after it was over we all three sat without speaking . . . News of the oath was imparted to the Sheykh's household and when Wilfrid entered the great tent . . . they all stood up and the eldest made a little speech to the effect that this tent and all the Shammar tents were his, Wilfrid's, and their camels and sheep and all they had.' The Hatoun Amsheh, the Sheykh's mother, sent for Lady Anne, kissed her and said that she was now her mother too, and if the Blunts were ever in any difficulty, Inshallah, her son would help them. 'I am sure these are not mere empty words,' added Lady Anne.

When they departed on March 19th Faris sent with them a boy Ghánim as camel-driver, 'a strange wild-looking youth, with a merry smile, white teeth, and a peculiar glitter in his eyes, which were half green, half hazel, like a cat's, while long wisps and plaits of hair hung all about his face in picturesque confusion. There was something singularly attractive in his manner; and his voice had a caressing, supplicating tone'. He was intelligent and willing, and could turn his hand to any-

thing. Best of all he beguiled the drearier stretches of their journey and their evenings with songs of departed heroes improvised to chords and discords on a little fiddle made of parchment, its bow strung with horse-hair. The songs echoed thin and remote in the clear air across the desert.

In return Blunt offered to give Faris his rifle or pistol. 'No,' said the Sheykh, 'I am better as my fathers were'—a remark which must have gone straight to Blunt's heart. Besides, Faris felt that he could accept no present since he had no colt or filly to give Blunt in accordance with Bedouin custom. 'All I can do for you is this. My people shall make you the raft you will require for crossing the Khábur [a tributary to the Euphrates; a broad stream and difficult to cross]. They would not do it for the Pasha, or even for the Sultan, for it is fellahin work, fit only for the Jiburi, but they will do it for you, because, you see, you are one of us.'

True to his word, Faris and his people saw the Blunts safely across the river, a nerve-wracking procedure which thoroughly frightened Lady Anne whose one fear was of water. The animals were swum across; the Blunts and their servants were taken over on a square raft of goatskins blown up like bladders and tied together with a slight framework of tamarisk boughs, 'the most rickety looking thing', remarked Lady Anne sharply, 'ever people trusted themselves to on deep water'. The Bedouins enjoyed themselves thoroughly, shouting and laughing and playing tricks to frighten the travellers. But it was all good natured and in the end successful. The Arabs' farewells were repeated and enthusiastic: 'Our tribe is your tribe, our tents your tents. Come back to us soon, and we will make you tents, and give you camels and mares. You shall live with us every winter, and in summer, when it is hot, you shall have a stone house to retire to at Deyr.' Once safely across the river the Blunts were off again on the short trip back to Deyr, longing to see Skene, who was to meet them there with letters and news of Europe, and to tell him their adventures.

## 4

But no Skene was at Deyr when they arrived, and they were greeted by the old stubborn opposition on the part of the governor to their going among the tribes. Indeed the Pasha, displeased with them for having already travelled so far, was more than ever determined to prevent their reaching Jedaan. Again for some days he held them captive by his civilities. Again their efforts to get into communication with the Anazeh sheikh were fruitless. They were permitted to leave the town only under the pretence of going straight to Tudmur, ancient Palmyra—a pretence made a reality perforce by the governor's sending along a guide and an armed guard 'to protect them'.

With the guide, Mohammed-Ibn-Arûk, son of the sheykh of Tudmur, six feet tall and very handsome, Blunt soon struck up a friendship. Mohammed took him to visit a tribe of robbers with whom he had a most enjoyable time drinking coffee and chatting; and when they arrived at Tudmur Mohammed and all his family devoted themselves to entertaining the travellers hospitably. But he would not commit himself to leading them to Jedaan, who was reported to be with his tribe a little way southward. In desperation Blunt 'got him to the top of the Temple of the Sun' and there, with no other ears to hear, put it to him direct, would he or would he not take them to Jedaan. Mohammed said he would. The Pasha of Deyr was far away; Blunt with his eloquence and promise of reward was on the spot. Despite the war which they knew was raging between the Roala and Jedaan's tribe, the Sebaa, and the oppressive heat—the desert southward looked like a simmering furnace—Blunt would have been elated had Skene only been with them to give them an introduction to Jedaan. Save for that all their plans were in a fair way to accomplishment.

Suddenly, on the very day they were to begin the march, word came that Skene was approaching. He had been detained unexpectedly at Aleppo and, learning that they had left Deyr,

had followed them direct to Tudmur. He brought with him two new mares for the Blunts, one of which, Sherifa, proved a treasure later in England. Of her might have been written the very Arabian catalogue spoken by Abu Zeyd in Blunt's poem, *The Stealing of the Mare*:

The grey mare, the renowned: in the world there is none  
like her,

Not with the Persian kings, the Chosroës, the Irani.

Spare is her head and lean, her ears set close together;

Her forelock is a net, her forehead a lamp lighted,

Illumining the tribe, her neck curved like a palm branch,

Her wither clean and sharp. Upon her chest and throttle

An amulet hangs of gold. Her forelegs are twin lances.

Her hoofs fly forward faster even than flies the whirlwind.

Her tail bone held aloft, yet the hairs sweep the gravel;

Her height twice eight, sixteen, taller than all the horses.

Here are her virtues told in full enumeration,

Dear to her master's eye as gold and precious jewels.

At last they came up with Jedaan. But one interview and their hopes were dashed. The only mark that distinguished him as a great man was his eyes, 'hawk's eyes, piercing, fierce and cold'. Owing to the war and to the fact that two days before the Blunts arrived he had been married for the fifteenth time, he was somewhat preoccupied in manner. Blunt thought him ill-bred and boorish, a parvenu who had won his position solely by his merit as a man of action and a politician, and refused to accompany him on a great raiding party, against the enemy tribe. He was interested all the same in the fantasia which Jedaan gave in their honour, and in the hawking of a bustard and the coursing of a fox by small greyhounds.

To Jedaan's credit, be it said, several remarks made by Lady Anne on the folly of letting petty squabbles over pasturage divide the strength of the tribes struck him with such force that he asked her to undertake a diplomatic mission to his enemies the Roala, whose camp lay on the way to Damascus,

in the hope of bringing about peace between them and his tribe of the Sebaa. This she agreed to do, the more readily as it proved a welcome excuse for leaving Jedaan.

For some distance they marched with the Gomussa, a tribe subsidiary to Jedaan's but still important. The sheykh of the tribe was a poor creature. His nephew Meshur Ibn Meshid, however, a young man renowned for warlike deeds of heroism, of agreeable countenance and charming manners, soon won Blunt's liking. As they sat together in the tent on the evening before Blunt's departure from the tribe, Blunt admired a pair of silver-hilted pistols hanging at Meshur's girdle. 'Without more ado Meshur unbuckled them,' wrote Lady Anne in her diary, 'and handed them to Wilfrid, insisting that he should keep them. Wilfrid was pleased at the manner in which he did this, but answered that he could not accept them unless Meshur would in turn accept his revolver, and, moreover, become his brother. Both proposals were very joyfully accepted.' So Blunt gained another brother among the Bedouins and, to preserve the family intact, made Meshur promise never to use the revolver against Faris.

Leaving the Gomussa they pushed their way toward the sheykh of the Roala, Sotamn, with their proposals of peace from Jedaan. Sotamn, a gentle old man, agreed to them, but was evidently too weak to lead or govern his people so that the proposals, at least for the time being, could come to nothing. But the first glimpse of the Roala camp had repaid the Blunts for their trouble. Quite suddenly, crossing a low ridge, they looked over the plain covered in all directions with a countless multitude of tents and men and mares and camels to the lake of Saighal glittering white in the sun ten miles away. It was 'the most wonderful spectacle the desert has to show,' wrote Lady Anne. 'I felt an emotion of almost awe, as when one first sees the sea.'

The Blunts stayed for several days with the Roala, breaking camp and marching southward with them. Then they left for Damascus, spending their last night in the desert on April 15th.

After debate they decided that Mohammed the Tudmuri was worthy of becoming Blunt's third Bedouin brother. Upon being offered a choice of that honour or money, Mohammed most satisfactorily chose the former and added to the oath a phrase new to the Blunts, '*Lel akhir min yomi*' ('to the last of my days'). He seemed duly impressed by the ceremony and promised to go the following winter with the Blunts to Jôf, the headquarters of his own people, the Beni Laam, from among whom they were to help him in the choice of a wife—a third wife as he already had two—a girl of noble blood, and worthy to marry a descendant of the Prophet Taleb such as Mohammed-Ibn-Arûk. The camels, the white donkey and Tamarisk, the mare that Lady Anne had ridden throughout the journey, but not loved, were sold. Sherifa and Blunt's mare, Hagar, that he had bought in Aleppo, of the Kehilan-Ajuz or old thoroughbred strain, the fastest, stoutest, most English-looking of all the Arab mares they had seen, Skene was to send later to England.

The farewells over, they left Damascus for Beyrout where they encountered the first rude shock of European society. As they were sitting on a divan at the end of the hotel dining-room, drinking their coffee 'in all the solemnity of Oriental repose, a sudden noise of voices and loud laughter resounded through the house, and presently the door burst open, and a tumultuous throng of men and women clad in trousers and coats, or in scanty skirts and jackets, according to their sex, but all with heads uncovered, and looking strangely naked, rushed across the floor. There may have been a dozen of them in all. Their faces were flushed and excited, as if they had been drinking wine; and they passed in front of us without pause or salute to the upper end of the room, and there, with no further ceremony, flung themselves each into his chair. The dresses, voices, gestures and attitudes of these men and women struck us as not only the most grotesque, but the most indecorous we had ever seen.' Worst of all, these were not Cook's tourists, but 'English milords of distinction' who had

arrived in their yacht from Malta. The Blunts were horrified.

Trivial as the incident seems, it doubtless brought to a head Blunt's admiration of all things Arabian in contrast to things Western. In their desert travels he had found a way of life completely suited to his pleasure. Whether it was to Lady Anne's it may possibly be questioned. The hardships and illnesses which she bore uncomplainingly on these travels would have daunted a woman less determined and perfectly devoted. For her it seems to have sufficed that Blunt had been happy as he had never been happy before, care free and able to admire or censure with no sense of responsibility. He had been looked up to and obeyed. He had even made a few firm friends. For that short time he had been king in the most idyllic sense. Small wonder then that the ways of the desert seemed socially more admirable than other ways, the trammels of life less irritating among the great tribes where the government satisfied the needs of the people as no other government satisfied those of any other people they had seen. It was patriarchal, traditional and within those austere limitations, free. The nominal suzerainty of Turkey, a corrupting influence, was its only drawback. And even that blemish was absent in the ideal government which they discovered in their Eastern travels of the following year.

Meantime they returned to England to hang the brace of pistols, given them by Blunt's brother Meshur, over the chimney piece of the hall, to place the stone head from Palmyra, given them by his brother Mohammed the Tudmuri, among the relics of past journeys, and to start the Arabian stud of which the half-dozen mares shipped to them by Skene formed the nucleus. This stud, founded with so comparatively little *éclat* in 1878 was presently to create a stir in sporting circles as well as in English society; it became one of the most important studs of the West, and was an absorbing interest to both Blunt and Lady Anne for the rest of their lives.

## 5

The Blunts had gone to Arabia for their own pleasure. Only when 'they saw that fortune had put them in the way of acquiring really valuable knowledge' did they decide to make their experience public. Using her diaries as a basis, Lady Anne with Blunt's aid wrote a spirited account of the journey, illustrated it with her own sketches and an extremely useful map, and dedicated it to the illustrious old Indian Nawab who had helped them to escape from Bagdad. It was the first published attempt to give a comprehensive view of desert life—not oasis or village life—and desert politics. No earlier traveller, moreover, had visited the independent Shammar in Mesopotamia or the Anazeh in the Hamad, although the other tribes encountered by the Blunts had been inspected before; and the fact that the journey had been made from no motive except enjoyment gave its history a special grace. Blunt himself edited and published the work in two volumes entitled *Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates*, adding the final five chapters of the second book which contained the information they had gathered about the geography and physical features of Northern Arabia, the history and the physical, religious and political characteristics of the Bedouins, together with all the facts obtainable about the Arabian horse and its breeding. He also wrote the preface and a postscript concerning the future of the country through which they had travelled, dealing mainly with the proposed railway along the Euphrates from Aleppo to Bagdad, and the partial success and the failings of the Turkish government. In reality, as Blunt said, the two volumes were 'a joint work, in which my first political views in regard to Arabian liberty may be traced by those who care to seek them'.

His mind full of what he had seen, he aired his views of Arabia with enthusiasm. Lord Salisbury had just accepted the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and, hearing echoes of Blunt's talk, asked Philip Currie to bring his cousin to see him. The



interview gave Blunt an opportunity to win over headquarters to his way of thinking. Salisbury was not cordial to his proposal that Syria and Egypt might join together against the misgovernment of their common suzerain Turkey: 'There could be no political connection,' he said, 'between the two provinces of the Ottoman Empire and . . . the case of each stood on a separate basis.' Nothing daunted, Blunt continued to expound his ideas as frankly and fully as possible. And with his arguments against the Euphrates valley railway scheme, a new danger to Arabian liberty, he had better success. In fact they weighed so heavily with Lord Salisbury 'that he shortly refused all Foreign Office support to the enterprise'—such, at least, is Blunt's own account of his influence. Whether or not it was really he who convinced the minister, who knows? In any case Lord Salisbury impressed Blunt by his personal integrity and, though their views never coincided, they were always friendly. The meeting had been a happy one for Blunt and filled him with hope.

Unfortunately the hope was ill-founded for events were taking place that formed, as Blunt wrote, 'a curious history truly, and deserving to be especially noted as marking the point of departure for England of a new policy of spoliation and treacherous dealing in the Levant foreign to traditional ways'.

In May 1878, a secret convention was negotiated by Sir Henry Layard, British Ambassador at Constantinople, signed by Disraeli and Lord Salisbury and by the youthful Sultan Abdul Hamid. In accordance with this convention Turkey leased the Island of Cyprus to England and England guaranteed the integrity of Asiatic Turkey in return for Turkey's promise to institute reforms there under the supervision of special English Consuls. England wished to establish an informal protectorate over Asiatic Turkey in order to check the advance of Russia in Asia to the Mediterranean. As for the Sultan, with the Russian army at the doors he had no choice but to accept the English alliance. He trusted, moreover, both

Sir Henry Layard and England. 'The honour of England was so great,' wrote Blunt later, 'in all Turkish eyes, and her policy toward the Moslem Empire had been so sympathetic that no suspicion existed anywhere of her having selfish plans.'

A month afterwards, on June 13th, the general European congress of 1878 was called together at Berlin. It had been summoned chiefly at British demand in order to revise the Treaty of San Stefano which Great Britain felt had given too much power to Russia. The unofficial disclosure at this Congress of the secret Cyprus Convention resulted in England's granting France's right to occupy a province of the Ottoman Empire, namely Tunis, at the first convenient opportunity if she would consent to England's occupation of Cyprus; in England's agreeing that France should act jointly with her in the financial arrangements then being made in Egypt; and in England's recognizing the French claim to protect Latin Christians in Syria. The Cyprus intrigue—that 'insane covenant' as Gladstone called it when he learned of it—was responsible, Blunt held, for half the crimes against Oriental and North African liberty witnessed by his generation.

The whole import of the government's 1878 policy was not of course immediately recognizable. But the Blunts found Cyprus a dusty wilderness when they landed there on their way to Arabia the following autumn and learned that to the professional mind of its first governor, Sir Garnet Wolseley, the island had little merit. And when they arrived in Syria they heard it spoken of among the Mohammedans as *backshish* taken by England for her services to Turkey. Blunt's pride as an Englishman was sensitive and such remarks cut deep. To them partly his feeling against the imperial policy owes its violence.

Before stopping at Cyprus the boat had called at Alexandria leaving Sir Rivers Wilson there as Finance Minister. He gave Blunt information that confirmed his interest in Egypt and served also as a standard of comparison with what he was to see in Arabia and later in India.

At Damascus, when the Blunts finally reached it, they had to collect the equipment for their journey into Central Arabia to visit Mohammed Ibn Rashid, Emir of Nejd, at Haïl. Nothing could be left to chance since they would travel for three months over a thousand miles of desert 'where it was impossible to count upon fresh supplies even of the commonest necessities of life'. They supplied themselves with enough food, added to the beef-tea and vegetable soup squares they had brought from England, to carry them comfortably to the first largish village, four hundred miles away. They bought riding and pack animals; and Blunt fitted himself out with complete Bedouin costume.

Since all this took time, they bought and settled in a small house in the Shariah Musjid-el-Kassab at the north-eastern end of the town on the road to Palmyra. Twenty-six years later Blunt returned and found it 'a funny little place . . . but nice inside with an inclosure of about an acre walled round and planted with lucerne, and a fine old stone wall, shutting us in from surrounding gardens'. On one side was the great garden, 'Bostan-el-Basha', belonging to a chief of the Damascus Ulema, and on the other the garden of that amazing English-woman, Jane Digby, Lady Ellenborough, and her Arabian husband, 'a very well bred and agreeable man', Mijuel el Mesrab.

As they had met the Mesrab tribe on their travels of the year before and had become acquainted both with one of Mijuel's sons and with his elder brother, the sheykh of the tribe, they were warmly welcomed by both Mijuel and his wife. Blunt greatly admired Lady Ellenborough for her benevolence to her husband's tribe in whose behalf she toiled and lavished her wealth. Her view of the Arabs in general was Blunt's view. She could, and did, give him much information fortifying his own impressions.

They found a number of other people too in Damascus to interest them. The Algerian patriot, the Seyyid Abd-el-Kader, whose simplicity of character and sound good sense

charmed Blunt, was living out a much-honoured and dignified old age at Salahiyyeh; the ex-leader of the Turkish Constitutional party, Midhat Pasha, whose 'improvements' they had seen at Bagdad, was there; and Sir Edward Malet. Sir Edward Malet was then Secretary of the Embassy at Constantinople. Blunt had served with him twice in the diplomatic service under 'his excellent father' and, though never particularly sympathetic with him, had been most intimate with his whole family. 'The duty of a diplomatist,' Blunt wrote, 'except in very rare cases, is in no way different from that of a solicitor', and Malet, a man of fair ordinary abilities, was constituted to play the role admirably. He had industry, caution and good sense, but lacked imagination and initiative. That he should have been given some years later in Egypt a position of responsibility requiring prompt decision and strong action was almost as inexplicable to Blunt as the Egyptians crediting him 'with an ambitious and intriguing restlessness'.

Though they were not congenial at Damascus, the distrust that was to grow up between them had not yet appeared and Blunt asked Sir Edward to accompany him and Lady Anne on their journey into Central Arabia. Sir Edward naturally refused the Blunts' 'more romantic plan' and stuck to his own of travelling on the 'common tourist road'.

## PILGRIMAGE TO NEJD

## I

IN accordance with their plans of the previous summer the Blunts left Damascus for Nejd with Blunt's 'brother' Mohammed Ibn Arûk the Tudmuri, Hanna again as cook, Hanna's 'brother', two camel drivers, and full equipment including four *delûls* for riding and four big baggage camels. Nejd had long assumed for them 'the romantic colouring of a holy land'—not least because they then believed it 'the original home and birth-place of the Arabian horse'. The story of this adventurous journey is told in *A Pilgrimage to Nejd*, nominally written by Lady Anne but again in reality a joint production.<sup>1</sup>

As the pilgrimage included a search after two families of relations of Mohammed Ibn Arûk of whom nothing had been heard for nearly a hundred years, plans were necessarily vague. 'To Mohammed and the Arabs with whom we travelled,' Blunt wrote in the Preface to Lady Anne's account, 'as well as to most of those we met upon our journey, his family history formed a perpetual romance, and the *Kasid* or ballad of Ibn Arûk came in on every occasion, seasonable and unseasonable, as a chorus to all that happened. But for it, I doubt whether the journey could ever have been accomplished.' They were received as friends, members of the Ibn Arûk family, everywhere, and passed on from kinsman to kinsman.

Leaving Damascus on December 13th, 1878, they travelled from village skeykh to village sheykh, until, nine days later, they left civilization with a guide to take them over the black stones of the Harra to the robber-infested Wady Sirhan which

Blunt had it at heart to explore as no European before them, he thought, had done. Just before they arrived at Kâf on the edge of the wady, as Lady Anne leaned over to arrange something on the saddle, her fidgety *delûl* bolted and pitched her off, spraining her knee. The pain was 'indescribable' and made her lame for some time though she continued the march mounted on her mare.

Not long after this accident Blunt and Lady Anne, letting the rest of the caravan go ahead, dismounted for a rest and tied their mares to a bush. Suddenly they heard the thud of galloping. Blunt jumped up crying, 'Get on your mare. This is a *ghazû*'. But Lady Anne's sprained knee gave way, and, as she struggled to her feet a troop of horsemen charged down upon them at full gallop. They knocked her down with a spear and all set upon Blunt. His gun and sword were ahead on his *delûl* and he had only Lady Anne's gun, unloaded. This they snatched and brought down on his head three times, with such force that the stock broke. Seeing that resistance was useless, Lady Anne shouted to the nearest horseman '*Ana dahilak* [I am under your protection]' and Blunt threw himself off his mare which was promptly seized by the enemy along with Lady Anne's.

As soon as they recovered breath the raiders asked who they were and where they came from. 'English, and we have come from Damascus,' they replied, 'and our camels are close by. Come with us and you shall hear about it.' Unexpectedly the horsemen agreed and walked on with their captives to where Mohammed and the servants had entrenched themselves behind the kneeling camels. More questions and all was well. The raiders were of the tribe of Sheykh Ibn Shaalan who, as the Blunts' host of the year before, was obliged with all his men to protect them. The mares and gun were returned and everyone sat down on the sand to eat dates and pass around the pipe of peace.

When the Bedouins had gone the Blunts examined their hurts. Blunt's were only bruises. The stock of the gun, steel

and all, was broken but his head had been saved by the rope he wore round it, and his thick clothes had protected him from the lances. As for Lady Anne, she was so angry at her sprain's preventing them from galloping up with the camels to receive the enemy in proper fashion that she almost forgot the pain of it. 'I was asked if I was not frightened,' she wrote, 'but in fact there was at first no time, and afterwards rage swallowed up every other feeling. Wilfrid says, but I do not believe him, that he felt frightened, and was very near running away and leaving me, but on reflection, stayed. The affair seems more alarming now that it is over, which is perhaps natural.'

Leaving the Wady Sirhan they crossed the Hamad to Jôf, a disappointing small town which had been conquered and was held by Ibn Rashid through his governor, a coal-black and capricious negro despot. There they found Mohammed's relations—now, through the tie of brotherhood, their relations—whom they had been seeking, and negotiations were at once entered into for a wife. Lady Anne was sent to the harem to look over possibilities. She reported a younger daughter, good tempered, intelligent and pretty, with 'great dark eyes like a fawn' and 'a particularly open honest look'. Mohammed on hearing the description directly lost both his heart and his head, going about boasting of his forthcoming marriage. The dower fee demanded rose accordingly. A council of all the relations presided over by Blunt was called in the Blunts' tent and after considerable wrangling it was arranged that the girl should be bestowed upon Mohammed for the sum of £50. Blunt paid the dower as he had always intended to do though he had not said so, wishing Mohammed to strike his own bargain.

Three days passed before all difficulties were quite settled—and then only because of Blunt's firmness. The marriage contract was signed and the evening spent in jubilation, a kid was killed and eaten, songs were sung and stories told. Meantime the Blunts set about conciliating the governor of

Jôf, in order to obtain his permission to pursue their journey to Haïl. They found him a tall, very fat, very vain black man dressed to receive them in his best and brightest silks including sky-blue trousers. His heart was ultimately softened by a judicious present of clothes and money and he consented to send a guide with them through the Nefûd. They were summoned to a farewell feast with him, carpets were spread on the roof and in the broiling sun amidst myriads of flies a breakfast of boiled meat and rice was served. They retired from the audience with no regret.

On the Blunts' departure, the Ibn Arûks belied their noble lineage. Corrupted by town life they begged for presents as no true Bedouin would have done. However, they had been so kind that Blunt exchanged promises of mutual good will, solemnly kissing 'his relations' all round, and set forth with high heart on the next and most dangerous part of the journey over the Nefûd, the wide desert of sand-dunes in central Arabia.

## 2

There were two ways of crossing the Nefûd, the easier one a march of thirteen days, and a more difficult one of ten days. 'For the sake of seeing the Nefûd at its worst,' the Blunts chose the ten-day route. 'The Nefûd,' Lady Anne explained, 'has been the object of our dreams all through this journey, as the *ne plus ultra* of desert in the world. We hear wonderful accounts of it here, and of the people who have been lost in it. This ten days' journey represents something like two hundred miles, and there are only two wells on the way, one on the second, and another on the eighth day.' Providing themselves with eight skins of water for mares and men, dates, bread and a kid, they started on January 12th for the great desert.

Like a stormy sea it stretched out east and west to the



horizon in great billows the colour of rhubarb and magnesia. In the spring when the red sands were covered with fresh green grass the Bedouins pastured their flocks there, for at that time of year their camels were in milk and they had no need of water. But in January only occasional raiding parties were to be met with. No heavily laden caravan such as Blunt's, if he was to believe their guide, had ever crossed the Nefûd at that point and should the camels break down they would be helpless. On the eve of leaving the first well Blunt warned his men of the hundred miles of deep sand they must cross before coming to the second well, and the necessity of husbanding strength for the effort. He appointed one of the camel drivers 'sheykh of the water', with orders to dole it out in rations every night and allow nobody to drink during the day.

For the first miles the desert was covered with camel tracks with here and there the track of a horse; then all trace of domestic creatures ceased. According to the guide they were following the road of Abu Zeyd, but to them it seemed as if they were merely 'wandering about in zig-zags in a southerly direction, sometimes toiling up steep slopes, at others making a long circuit to avoid a *fulj* [a deep pit] and sometimes meandering for no reason—always on a perfectly untrodden surface of yielding sand.' A thunderstorm on the first evening packed down the sand so that the camels could progress fairly easily and the horses gallop. The Blunts were able to course a rabbit or two with their greyhound. Presently they came to the peaks of Aalem, two conical rocks jutting out of the sand, well-known landmarks. Climbing up they saw the crimson desert stretching away on every side. 'What a place to be buried in,' said Blunt, 'Mount Nebo must have been like this.' To his delight he found a painted butterfly clinging to the rock. It must have flown four hundred miles from Hebron since there was no nearer vegetation suited to caterpillars. They saw, too, many sorts of small birds and reptiles.

Two days from the second well the sands dried out, the

camels flagged, and the men were obliged to walk. They took it cheerfully, even singing and playing pranks to test their strength. Then the water ran short. All the Mohammedans of the party began to say their prayers zealously. The sand seemed to become deeper and deeper. January 19th was a terrible day. Two of the camels could carry no load. One could not even carry his saddle. Had it not been for the extraordinary strength of Hatherán, the gigantic camel which led the procession and on whom most of the extra loads were piled, a great part of their outfit would have had to be abandoned. The men struggled along, uncomplaining though now grown silent. 'Even old Hanna, with stray locks of grey hair hanging from under his *kefiyeh*, for he had grown grey on the journey, and his feet bare, since it was impossible to walk in shoes, trudged on as valiantly as the most robust of the party.' Only the Blunts themselves were morose, disgusted that they lacked the strength of the Arabs and were obliged to ride much of the time. The caravan crept along at little over a mile an hour. They had all but given up hope of pulling through. Suddenly, near sunset, Jobba came into view, the oasis towards which they were struggling and which, but for the hardening of the sands in the first day's thunderstorm, they never would have reached.

Jobba seemed to them the most beautiful village in the world, its battlemented walls and brilliant green gardens set in a strip of yellow sand backed by the towering rocks of the Nefûd, purple sandstone veined with yellow and with an upper facing of black. From the cliffs above could be seen the faint blue, oddly fantastic outline of Jebel Shammar, the hills of Nejd. Towards them they floundered in leisurely fashion after a rest at Jobba, the men singing and joking as they went, and making the nights merry with feasting and games around great bonfires in the starlight. There was no hurry now that they had passed the second well. Three days later they quitted the red sands of the Nefûd and were in the hills where 'the very air would exhilarate even a condemned.

man' and the ground was crisp and firm and they could indulge their tired mares in a fantasia.

Blunt declared that he would die happy now even if they had their heads cut off at Haïl. He was fond of saying that all places in the world are exactly alike. But Jebel Shammar struck him as unlike every other place except possibly Mount Sinai, and it was more beautiful than that. At Haïl they were to hear vague rumours of a Christian stranger having been there just before their arrival but paid little attention and did not learn of Charles Montagu Doughty's wanderings until nine years later.<sup>2</sup> 'No European nor Christian of any sort had penetrated as such before us to Jebel Shammar,' Lady Anne wrote, 'and all we knew of the people and country was the recollection of Mr. Palgrave's account of his visit there in disguise sixteen years before.'

The people of Jobba, an inquisitive ill-mannered lot, had seemed none too friendly: their unpleasant allusions to the Christian religion—the only taunts encountered by the Blunts in Arabia—made the travellers fearful of what was in store for them at Haïl among Wahhabis, the puritans of Islam. Their guide told them grisly details of Mohammed Ibn Rashid's seizure of power by the murder of his relations. They felt as though they were 'going toward a wild beast's den'.

### 3

When the guide, whom Blunt had sent ahead with letters to Ibn Rashid, returned they were somewhat reassured. The Emir had read the letters, would be delighted to see them and had ordered two houses to be got ready for them to occupy. As the travellers, used now to villages that were mere cluttered groups of mud hovels in the shade of a few tattered palms, rode through the gates of Haïl the town made an impression of spick and span neatness, almost like a stage set. At the Emir's palace they were met by the chamberlain, so dignified

and finely costumed, that they took him to be Ibn Rashid himself, and by a host of retainers who welcomed them and gave them coffee. They thought they had never seen so many agreeable faces collected together as here in the fierce Emir's palace in Central Arabia.

Surrounded by a number of attendants, the Emir entered, tall, lean and gorgeously dressed, a commanding figure. He smiled graciously as he exchanged salutations with Blunt, Lady Anne and Mohammed Ibn Arûk but his strange, tense face recalled uncomfortably portraits of Richard the Third: 'sallow cheeks, much sunken, thin lips, with an expression of pain, except when smiling, a thin black beard, well defined black knitted eyebrows, and remarkable eyes—eyes deep sunk and piercing, like the eyes of a hawk, but ever turning restlessly from one of our faces to the other, and then to those beside him. It was the very type of a conscience-stricken face, or of one which fears an assassin. His hands, too, were long and claw-like, and never quiet for an instant incessantly playing, while he talked, with his beads, or with the hem of his *abba*.'

Very soon he took them to see his gardens, his kitchens and, what interested them most of all, what, indeed, they had come to see, his stud. It was made up of a collection bought from different desert tribes, as there was no special Nejd breed, and was kept in four communicating open yards. Unprotected, except for heavy rugs fastened across their chests, the animals stood tethered by the feet each to a square manger of sun-dried brick. These, the most famous horses in Arabia, presented in January the frowsy appearance of unkempt ponies. The Blunts were grievously disappointed. The horses seemed less good, if anything, than many of those they had seen in the north the year before. On further inspection, however, with opportunity to examine the points of each horse, they appreciated the collection at its worth. The Emir's horses deserved their epithet of 'little lions'.<sup>3</sup>

With Nejd politics and personages they soon became well

acquainted. Every morning Blunt went to the Emir's *mejlis*, or court of justice, and then paid visits to Hamud, the Emir's cousin who had supported Ibn Rashid in his murderous rise to power, or to Mubarek, the Emir's chief slave, or others of the palace *entourage* with whom he made friends. Lady Anne fulfilled the destiny that awaited her at every Bedouin camp and town of visiting the harem. She sat for long hours with the Emir's ladies, of whom the dominating figure was Amusheh, his chief wife, a woman of some distinction and cleverness, so magnificently robed as to present 'an appearance of splendid shapelessness'. With Hamud's amiable first wife and browbeaten second-class wife, she drank tea and ate sweet limes.

In general they were prudent, refraining from wandering about without escort from the Emir, for though they experienced only politeness from the people of Haïl they suspected that very little was needed to arouse Wahhabi fanaticism.<sup>4</sup> Their policy was wise: some of the people were anything but pleased, they learned afterwards, at the amiable welcome given them by the Emir. In the Emir's palace or under escort of his officers they were quite safe. No objection even was made to Blunt's smoking his pipe whenever he chose though to the strict Wahhabi tobacco is anathema.

Cordial relations were in full swing when suddenly a coldness appeared in everyone's manner. Presents of game from the Emir ceased; the lamb with which they had hitherto been regaled at dinner was replaced by camel meat; instead of two soldiers coming to escort them to the palace, a slave boy appeared with a message; on the fifth day they were not invited to Ibn Rashid's evening party; and on the sixth, Blunt, calling at the palace, was curtly told that the Emir was not at home. Not only did the Emir leave off paying them the customary attentions but Mohammed Ibn Arûk, 'usually so cheerful and so open-hearted, had become moody and embarrassed, keeping almost entirely with the servants'; the other servants seemed unwilling to do their duty; and the faithful Hanna

began to hint darkly that things were not well. The Blunts were alarmed. Blunt sought an explanation from the chamberlain and other court functionaries. Things, he discovered, were come to a pretty pass. Mohammed Ibn Arûk had boasted that the Blunts were persons of small account and in his care, whereas he himself was important. It did not take long for Blunt to prick that bubble. Friendly relations were resumed—but the affair had given them a most unpleasant turn.

To mark the renewal of cordiality Ibn Rashid invited them to join his retinue on a visit to the Persian Haj, the pilgrims who on their return from Mecca had encamped outside the town, 'spread over the plain like locusts'. It was one of those mornings, Lady Anne wrote, one finds only in Nejd, in the very centre of the desert four hundred miles from the sea and nearly four thousand feet above sea level. The air was so exhilarating that it made them want to shout. The sky was intensely blue and the plain sloped smoothly upwards towards hills carved out of sapphire. Behind them were the battlemented walls of Hail, with the palace rising from palms almost black in the sunlight; and before, lay the camp—parti-coloured tents, blue, green, red, white, and the pilgrims themselves 'a dark crowd, watching with curious half-frightened eyes the barbaric display of which we formed a part'.

Sedately, beside Ibn Rashid, they rode out into the plain surrounded by his followers shouting, curvetting, galloping off and then doubling and returning to the Emir, staging a sham fight that to the travellers had all the appearance of a real one. At last the Emir himself could resist the excitement no longer. He galloped off among his men, shouting and brandishing his spear with the best of them. The Blunts were left to contemplate with delight this marvellous exhibition of the speed and agility of Ibn Rashid's mares. They had come to Nejd in the express hope of just such an exhibition.

As they watched they found themselves alone with 'a strange little personage:' 'mounted on a sorry little Kadish,

and dressed in the fashion of European children of fifty years ago, with a high-waisted coat, well pleated at the skirt, trousers up to his knees, and feet shod with slippers, a little brown skull cap on his head, and a round shaven face, sat what seemed to be an overgrown boy, but what in reality was a chief person from among the Persian pilgrims'. It was Ali Koli Khan, son of the great Sheykh of the Bactiari, in whose honour as well as in the Blunts' the Emir had arranged this state visit to the Haj.

The friendship they at once struck up with Ali Koli and a very natural desire to get away from the uneasy life at Haïl, determined the Blunts to march with the Haj when it departed a few days later. With Ibn Rashid their parting was cordiality itself: Blunt offered to be his Wakil in Europe in case he required assistance of any kind; and Ibn Rashid, to show his faith in them, sent them on their last day at Haïl to see the fortress of Agde, never before shown to any stranger. He invited them, moreover, to stay on at Haïl and to accompany him on a great *ghazâ* on which he planned shortly to ride out. Thinking it the part of wisdom to leave while terms were so happy, the Blunts persisted in following their plan of travelling with the Haj towards Bagdad.

## 4

On February 1st they left Haïl marching in the vanguard of the Haj. The procession stretched away like ants across the plain, three miles or more in length. First walked or almost ran, the dervishes, followed by a group of respectably dressed people who walked out of piety. Then came the banner of Ibn Rashid, protector of the Haj, borne in the centre of a group of magnificently caparisoned dromedaries moving at a fast walk. Last followed the crowd of pilgrims with their four thousand or so camels. They were mounted sometimes two on one camel, sometimes with a couple of boxes

on each side containing the household furniture. The better class of pilgrims and all the women except the very poor, rode in panniers, 'covered over like a tradesman's van with blue or red canvass', or in litters fitted up with considerable elegance. One old fellow kept a man to march in front of the camel with his *nargileh* which, sitting in the panner above, he smoked through a very long tube.

The pilgrims lacked that 'sense of propriety which is so characteristic of Arabs', and were far from agreeable either in person or in habits. Some, being fanatical Shias, were definitely hostile to the Blunts' Mohammedan servants who were Sunnis. But most of them were friendly enough and might have been interesting if the Blunts could have spoken their language or they could have spoken Arabic.

Already wearied when they left Hail by their long march from Mecca and short of food, the pilgrims were in sore straits before half the distance to Mershid, the first town, was accomplished. The deep white sand wore down the underfed camels—the way was strewn with dead camels—and was so fine that sandstorms were frequent. In a particularly violent storm the day before reaching Mershid, Ali Koli Khan was reported lost. Up to that time the Blunts had seen something of him but, though they learned at Mershid that he was still alive and pursuing his journey, they never met him again.

They were slightly better off than the pilgrims. Though, like them they lived chiefly on the locusts with which the country swarmed, they had laid in provisions at Hail and were able to vary their diet, with the help of their greyhound and hawk, by hares and gazelles and bustards—even, once, by a hyena. Their beasts, however, suffered. Almost on the edge of the artificial lake on which Mershid stands, and well within sight of the long line of its fine old walls and the burnished gold dome of its mosque, the youngest and ugliest of Blunt's camels lay down, too weak to walk further. 'I shall not easily forget his face,' said Lady Anne, 'looking wistfully after his companions as they disappeared over the crest of the hill. He is



the first of our small party that has fallen out of the ranks, and we are depressed with the feeling that he may not be the last.'

They arrived at Mershid nearly at the end of all their resources of money, strength and patience. Indeed Blunt looked so out of elbows that a tribesman of Faris, Blunt's brother of the previous year, who happened to be in the town and recognized him, pressed upon him the £10 which he had lent Faris. Needless to say, Blunt, though gratified, refused. Their weariness, combined with the fact that Mershid was another hotbed of religious fanaticism, its shrine of Ali as sacred to the Shias as the Casba at Mecca, hastened the Blunts on their way with no more delay than was necessary to refit their caravan. Passing through the holy city of Kerbela, they reached Bagdad and the Residency on March 6th—the first Europeans to have travelled from Hail to Bagdad along the Persian pilgrim route.<sup>5</sup> To sleep in beds after the past three months was luxury.

## 5

Amongst the letters awaiting them at Bagdad they found an invitation from Lord and Lady Lytton to spend the summer, or part of it, at Simla. It was an opportunity never again likely to occur, of going to India by land and visiting the Bactiari mountains and their acquaintance, Ali Koli Khan. Unfortunately he had not turned up since the sandstorm; but they remembered his talk of his father's wonderful stud of Arabians and his proposal that they should travel with him to visit it.

Lady Anne questioned the wisdom of attempting such a journey but Blunt's 'thirst for exploration was not yet slaked'. Spring was just beginning, he argued, and nothing in the world could be more delightful than spring in Persia. If the weather became too hot, he said with what seemed afterwards

an ironic optimism, they could get down at any moment to some port on the Persian Gulf.

The deciding factor was the arrival of Captain Cameron, the African traveller, who had just finished the first stages of a survey for an Indo-Mediterranean railway from Tripoli through Bushire to the Indus. Blunt offered to help him in the remaining more serious part of the task. They agreed to take different routes from Bagdad and meet again at Bushire or Bender Abbas: Captain Cameron was to follow the left bank of the Tigris as far as Amara and then to strike across the marshy plains to Ahwas and Bender Dilam, while the Blunts were to keep farther East, skirting the Hamrin and Bactiari hills, through Luristan, a district of Persia still spoken of by travellers with awe because of its dangers.

In an evil day, without due consideration of the difficulties and dangers to be encountered, the plan was settled. Preparations were made with as little reflection as the decision itself. It was dangerous to begin such a journey with new servants, and Mohammed Ibn Arûk, Hanna, Ibrahim and the camelmen, all their old servants, had left them on their arrival at Bagdad. Colonel Nixon, as he had done the year before, provided them with a cavass, Hajji Mohammed, who, though far from being youthfully agile or quick witted, turned out to be their mainstay. As interpreter he was particularly useful since the Blunts could speak no Persian. But the cook that they hired had to be sent away soon after the start; the camelmen were so poor that, when the Blunts met them several marches down the river, where they had been sent ahead, one camel was missing and the others were unfit to travel.

The start on March 20th had other cheerless aspects. Rain came down in sheets and the land 'seemed a mere slough'. Wild boars infested the countryside which the miserable inhabitants of the district begged Blunt to kill. In two and a half hours he got five boars and a sow. Triumphant, he went out again the following day, taking Lady Anne on her mare and a crowd of natives with him. They gave chase to a great

red fellow. Twice he was hit but just as the people on foot rushed on to dispatch him he charged. Blunt turned his mare, firing as he turned, but not quickly enough. The beast tossed mare and rider into the air. Blunt was unhurt. But the mare's leg was ripped up in a ghastly wound from hock to stifle. Blunt and Lady Anne tore off their *kefiyehs* to staunch the blood. Tenderly as they cared for her, she could hardly walk. They had to leave her, 'the noblest and best and gentlest creature that ever was', promising a handsome reward if she were pulled through and sent back to Bagdad in safety.

Having no guide they were obliged to adopt their old policy of being passed on from sheykh to sheykh. On leaving the neighbourhood of the Tigris their camel men deserted and, with only old Hajji Mohammed to serve them they fell into the hands of a poor, treacherous tribe of Beni Laam who, had they not been arrant cowards, would have taken the travellers' lives as well as money. The chief's brother, a man with a face like a thundercloud, a hideous squint, the smile of a wild beast and the manner of a cat—soft, cowardly, and very offensive—was detailed to guide them through the no-man's-land between Turkey and Persia. His right-hand man, a villainous one-eyed rascal, and forty extraordinary looking vagabonds, were to be the escort. They were driving camels and oxen with empty sacks to Dizful 'to buy corn'. Clearly they were robbers. Being Shias they made life wretched for the Suni Hajji Mohammed and with shouts and importunate questionings almost drove the Blunts mad. After dark the danger was great. On the first night Hajji Mohammed crept near enough the Arab's camp-fire to overhear their talk: a debate on whether and when and how the Blunts were to be murdered. Later the headman crept up and lifted their tent flap. 'Who goes there', cried Lady Anne who was on the lookout for trouble. The man disappeared.

Absolutely in the hands of the robbers, Blunt took the wisest course open of putting on a great show of good humour and boldness. He rode out into a river and drove the camels

who were being carried down-stream by the swift current to the other shore; he laughed at the Arabs' fear of attack by Persians; he outfaced the treachery of the Arab chiefs. Lady Anne bravely followed his lead. Their cool superiority intimidated the rabble but it was a nerve-racking march. The beauty of the country alone kept up their spirits—'a garden of Eden' to look upon, plains of grass and flowers knee-deep intersected by rivers and swamps, the Haurin hills behind and the snowy Bactiari mountains before.

At last they reached the camp of an impoverished and exiled Shahzade or member of the Persian royal family and placed themselves under his protection. Delighted to talk with respectable people again he showed them every courtesy, though not as the Bedouins of Arabia would have done, for the sake of hospitality. They were obliged to pay him a round sum for everything they received as was the case with all the Persians whom they ran across. He gave them an escort to Kerim Khan, the second most powerful chief of Luristan, whose tribe occupied most of the district formerly known as Susiana. In turn Kerim Khan sent them on to Dizful, a small town on the great river Diz at the foot of the mountains, and thence, through cornfields and fine plains of brilliant green turf sprinkled over with anemones and borage flowers, to the encampment of Husseyn, Ali Koli Khan's father.

In Persia, unlike Arabia, a person was usually judged entirely by his outward dress and his retinue; although the Blunts had no retinue and were dressed in shabby Bedouin clothes, and, moreover, were without letters to him or introduction from his son, Khan Husseyn received them cordially and conversed with them for two hours. He was the greatest chieftain of all western Persia and very imposing, reminding Lady Anne of pictures of Genghis Khan. As he was on his way to Teheran he was unable to show them his stud, which he kept in the mountains—a disappointment so sore as to make them feel the journey ill worth its hardship.

He sent them on to Shustar where, while the authorities

delayed them, they were put up in the deserted palace and garden of the absent Prince governor of the district, a fairyland which they could hardly enjoy. The heat had become terrific. Flies and mosquitoes swarmed in clouds. Blunt fell suddenly ill. As soon as the governor's understudy would permit they left, but progressed only a few miles before being obliged to camp. Blunt had become alarmingly worse; he could not sit up, and was unconscious most of the night.

Slightly better in the morning, though still unable to move, he decreed that they should travel by night, he on his *delûl*. By short night stages they approached the village of Ram Hormuz until when ten miles away, with a prodigious effort of will, Blunt mounted his mare and with Lady Anne galloped ahead into the town. Through one of those miracles that occurred not infrequently in Blunt's life, the swift ride cured him. It was probably during that gallop that Lady Anne saw the vision which caused her conversion to Roman Catholicism.

At Ram Hormuz they were more pleasantly received than anywhere else in Persia and felt they might have made friends there if only they had been able to speak the language. The chief government official walked out to their camp in the cool of sunrise with a rose in his hand to pay his compliments. The camp, outside the walls of the village, at the foot of snow-covered mountains, was a lovely place in a field of green wheat on the bank of a small winding stream. Near by stood the little tomb of some saint in gardens half run wild of palm-trees and blossoming roses and pomegranates. Nightingales sang in the thickets. But Ram Hormuz was like a furnace. And always there was the plague of flies and mosquitoes. They were weary of travel and doing all their own drudgery. Blunt was reduced almost to a skeleton.

The rest of the journey was little better than a feverish dream of heat and flies. Still proceeding by night marches they at last reached Dilam on the Persian gulf, proud of having done what few Europeans had ever done before: come all the way by land from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf.

They had travelled over two thousand miles. And in the last ill-advised Persian march had, themselves, driven their camels without accident five hundred miles over mountains said to be impassable for camels, and 'through swamps and streams never before traversed by camels, and across nine large rivers, one of them bigger than the Rhine.'

On April 28th, dog-tired, reduced to little more than skin and bone, they entered Bushire. 'When we arrived at the door of the Residency,' Lady Anne wrote, 'the well-dressed sepoy in their smart European uniforms, barred us the door with their muskets. They refused to believe that such vagabonds, blackened with the sun, and grimed with long sleeping on the ground, were English gentlefolk or honest people of any sort.'

'When I think of it now with my better knowledge of Arabia,' Blunt said forty years later of the journey to Nejd and Persia, 'and of the wild people who carry on there the life of the primitive world unchanged from the time of the Princes who brought gifts to Solomon, and with so little knowledge and experience to guide us, I am filled with wonder at our foolhardiness in attempting it and still more at our success in carrying it out so easily.'

## 6

The Blunts' journeys to Nejd and Iraq as well as their previous summer's travels added considerably to European knowledge of Arabia. They brought back new information about the Arabian horse. More important, they made valuable contributions to geographical science in *A Pilgrimage to Nejd* which cannot be disregarded,<sup>6</sup> as Hogarth has pointed out, 'even where such close observers of Arab life as Palgrave, Guarmani, and Doughty have recorded their experiences, or explorers have passed as well equipped as Wallin, Huber and Euting.'<sup>7</sup> They were not scientifically inclined, and carried

no instruments, except compass and barometer, but they were undisguised and free to take notes and their observation was so accurate that they helped to solve, for instance, the much debated question of the origin of *falj* pits, or *fuljes*, in the Nefūd. But what most distinguished them from other travellers, Hogarth also noted, was their 'romantic curiosity and imaginative sympathy with Bedouin society'. They understood the unique quality of the Shammar society of Nejd in contrast with the society of the rest of Arabia, the close relations and community of interest between its nomad and its town-settled members.

In Nejd the Blunts had found the supreme example of a country quite independent, with a government suitable and wholly satisfactory to its people, who though poor were contented. 'The political constitution of Jebel Shammar,' wrote Lady Anne, 'is exceedingly curious; not only is it unlike anything we are accustomed to in Europe, but it is probably unique, even in Asia. It would seem, in fact, to represent some ancient form of government indigenous to the country, and to have sprung naturally from the physical necessities of the land, and the character of its inhabitants. I look upon Ibn Rashid's government as in all likelihood identical with that of the kings of Arabia, who came to visit Solomon, and of the shepherd kings, who at a still earlier date, held Egypt and Babylonia; and I have little doubt that it owes its success to the fact of its being thus in harmony with Arab ideas and Arab tradition.'

Except for one flaw—the uncertainty of succession to the Sheykhat or Bedouin throne—the system seemed to the Blunts perfect. In Nejd, as nowhere in Europe, were to be found in actual existence liberty, equality and brotherhood. No taxes, no police, no conscription, no compulsion of any kind fettered and irritated the inhabitants, since their ruler depended on the citizens' good will: his army was made up of citizen soldiery. In short, as Blunt later wrote, this view 'of the ancient system of free government existing for so many centuries in the heart

of that wonderful peninsula, was to confirm me in the enthusiastic love and admiration I already entertained for the Arabian race'. It became to Blunt a symbol of what subject races and nations should work toward. He determined to do what he could to help the Arabian Bedouins to preserve 'their precious gift of independence'.

The admirable aspects of the state of Nejd were undoubtedly enhanced in Blunt's mind by their sharp contrast with the state of the Arabs of Iraq, the Beni Laam whom he had found 'demoralized, impoverished, and brutalized by Ottoman rule!' At the time he fulminated against Ottoman rule, because it was corrupt and corrupting, not against the rule of all foreign powers whoever they might be: that logical conclusion of his thought he had not as yet reached, for in speaking of those corrupted Arabians of Iraq, he said, 'in England's protection, if it could be given', lay 'a possible road for them to salvation'. This prediction Blunt would hardly have indulged in a few years later when his anti-imperialism was at its height. It is true that Iraq under English protection has been strengthened and set on her feet, and now is an honoured nation, but, Blunt would later have asked, is it any the better for that?

With the contrast between his ideal and the actual corruption of Iraq fresh in his mind, his first visit to India under British rule had a greater effect upon the formation of his views than might otherwise have been the case. He questioned sharply the paternal value of the English Government and made observations in 1879 at Simla that aided in shaping his 'ideas on larger questions of Imperial policy, giving them the direction they afterwards took'.

Taking boat from Bushire to Karachi in response to Lord Lytton's invitation the Blunts arrived at Peterhof, the Vice-



regal lodge at Simla, on May 16th, 1879. Lord Lytton had been for two years India's Viceroy and was just bringing his first Afghan campaign to a close. Superstitious by temperament, though a rationalist in religion, he spent his spare time in launching fire-balloons and auguring from their quick or slow ascension good or bad fortune for his army. The results were not allowed to decide his action but they soothed his high-strung nerves. Luckily he connected Blunt's coming to Simla with 'the good turn the war had taken' and looked upon him as long as he stayed as a fortunate influence.

Though Lytton and Blunt were necessarily at opposite political poles and though their temperamental romanticism took the form in Lytton of sentimentality and in Blunt of realism, they remained devoted and intimate friends. At Peterhof, therefore, Lytton made Blunt 'the confidant of all his thoughts'. Personally he was not only interested in Blunt's view of Arabia but sympathized with it; as a government official he could not, and did not wish to, go with Blunt beyond a definite point. But he did instruct his Foreign Secretary, Sir Alfred Lyall, and his Finance Minister, Sir John Strachey, to talk Arabian and Indian matters over with Blunt and to give him all possible information.

Ideas of Arab independence were agreeable to the official view because the Sultan of Turkey had begun to alarm India by pan-Islamic propaganda and had asserted a claim of sovereignty over the Persian Gulf ports which for many years past had been under a kind of protectorate exercised by the Indian Navy. Lyall, therefore, reported well of Blunt's Arabian views and it was half agreed that Blunt should return the following winter to Nejd bearing a complimentary message from the Viceroy to the Emir Ibn Rashid. Blunt rejoiced in the promise of such a mission for he was still a believer, though with failing faith, in the sincerity of British Imperial protection. Many years later, however, in 1907, he wrote: 'I am glad now, with my better knowledge of the Indian Government,

that the proposal led to no practical results.' It might have subjugated instead of freeing the Arabians.

At Simla he had already begun to distrust the consequences, however good the intentions might be, of English rule, but he thought that the rule 'could be improved and that the people at home would insist upon its being improved if they only knew'—and by 'the people at home' he meant the government in England. In a characteristic letter, less superficial than its liveliness makes it appear, to Harry Brand, later Lord Hampden, radical member of Parliament, he wrote that though a good conservative and member of the Carlton Club, he was shocked at the Egyptian bondage in which the Indian natives were held. It had given his faith in British institutions and the blessings of British rule a severe blow, and he had come to the conclusion that if England went on developing the country the inhabitants sooner or later would have to resort to cannibalism, for there would be nothing left for them to eat but each other. 'I do not clearly understand,' he continued, 'why we English take their money from these starving Hindoos to make railroads for them which they don't want and turnpike roads and jails and lunatic asylums and memorial buildings to Sir Bartle Frere, and why we insist upon their feeding out of their wretched handfuls of rice immense armies of policemen and magistrates and engineers.' He could not see, he said, the moral obligation which governments acknowledge of taxing people for debts they and not the people have incurred. In fact, all public debts even in a self-governing country seemed to him more or less dishonest and in a foreign despotism like India a mere swindle.

In another letter he expressed himself even more strongly: 'I believe the natives capable of governing themselves far better than we can do it, and at about a tenth part of the expense.' All these views he begged Brand to believe were his own, not those of the officials upon whose information they were based.

It is odd enough that such unorthodox opinions should have sprung from purely official information. While in India Blunt

'had no opportunity of conversing with so much as a single representative of its thoughts in opposition to the official views'. Not until he returned from India four years later, under Lord Ripon's viceroyalty, did he approach the problem of India's government with less one-sided knowledge. Needless to say, what he learned then from the natives and from personal observation of their life, strengthened his former opinions. The first journey to India schooled him somewhat in the ways and the point of view of foreign government and contributed largely to the crystallization of his views on England's methods in Egypt.

## ISLAM

## I

THE winter of 1879-80 in England was, Blunt afterwards noted, in certain ways the busiest of his life. His manifold gifts tempted him to remain in everything an amateur. Neither early training nor personal ambition led him to concentrate in any one discipline or field of endeavour. Moreover, the self-confidence that his brilliant abilities bred in him was accompanied by a constitutional shyness: on the one hand sensitively proud, often arrogant, and always unwilling to compromise, he was on the other, dependent to an unusual degree for his happiness on recognition. His self-dramatization harks back to this and a craving for the admiration and affection easily excited by his personal charm, especially from women with whom all his life long he was involved in love affairs. In public life he was a nonconformist, leaving the well-beaten tracks to assert himself by pulling strings, or executing some brilliant coup as a free-lance rather than assuming the responsibility of leadership.

Until his fortieth year he had taken no part in politics; he had never made a speech in public; never written an article for a review; never so much as sent a letter to a newspaper—an astonishing record in view of his later life. Now he began to talk and write and 'even overcame his timidity to the extent of appearing once or twice upon a public platform'. The years of travel in Arabia and India had given him confidence as well as the sense of 'a mission in the Oriental world, however vague and ill-defined'. To his old literary and social preoccupations were now added political interests. Invited to take part as a

distinguished traveller, together with M. Serpa Pinto, M. de Brazza, and Captain Cameron, in a meeting of the British Association in August 1879, he made his first public speech. Captain Cameron advocated a Euphrates railway; Blunt opposed the scheme. Captain Cameron had intended to explore one route from Bagdad to Bushire while the Blunts explored another. But he had turned back whereas the Blunts had succeeded in accomplishing their journey and knew its dangers.<sup>1</sup> The meeting was a triumph for Blunt and seemed to him to be an auspicious beginning. He followed it up in the *Fortnightly Review* by an article against the proposed railway that interested the editor, John Morley, in his Eastern ideas.

For the moment, however, he had too many irons in the fire to get on methodically with his Eastern propaganda. Not only was he writing poetry and arranging and editing the manuscript of *A Pilgrimage to Nejd*, but he was greatly pre-occupied with establishing his Arab stud at Crabbet, and was in constant correspondence about it with sportsmen, including the Jockey Club. In September, 1880, he published in the *Nineteenth Century* an article in which he argued the possibility of increasing the size of the Arab horse—a notion that he came later to consider mistaken.

The article coincided with the first of a series of annual visits to Newmarket where he was entertained at 'Warren House' by Prince Bathyani, familiarly known to the racing world as 'Old Bat'. Though Blunt enjoyed these visits and learnt something about breeding horses, he was not enough of a racing man to find life at Newmarket altogether congenial. The racing struck him as monotonous; cards, the inevitable evening amusement, he did not play; and he was no gambler. In fact he felt like a 'Turk at a christening'.

At Warren House he met most of the racing celebrities of the day, Lords Bradford and Falmouth, Sir John Hawkins, the Duke of St. Albans, Mr. Ten Brock, the American—all members of the Jockey Club where Blunt's project of breeding Arabs had been taken up by Lord Calthorpe. They announced

a special Arab race to be run under their auspices at Newmarket in four years' time and directed Weatherby to include Blunt's Arab importations under the head 'Arabians' as thoroughbreds in his stud lists. So Blunt became, as he said, an object of curiosity and the Crabbet stud of real interest, especially among the older men who still honoured the eighteenth-century tradition of Arabian importations. The subject was a good deal discussed in the Press and many visits were paid to Crabbet by breeders of thoroughbreds.

It was the Arab stud and his views on horseflesh, not his politics, that first brought him into 'epistolary communication' with Gladstone, whose pursuit of all things Greek made him curious to learn Blunt's theories about the horses of antiquity, and especially about the breeding of those of Greece and Troy. Through Knowles, editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, Gladstone asked for a memorandum on the genealogy of the horse. The ensuing correspondence, plus the fact that Edward Hamilton, Blunt's intimate friend, was appointed in 1880 to be one of Gladstone's secretaries, were the first links of Blunt's future communication with Gladstone.<sup>2</sup>

Blunt's interest in Eastern affairs led him to spend much time in London where he had established a *pied-à-terre* three years earlier at 10, James Street, Buckingham Gate. Now most of his social engagements began to have a political aspect. He breakfasted with Sir Rivers Wilson and discussed Egypt with General Gordon, 'a very wonderful man'. He called on his mother's old friend, Cardinal Manning, who asked how he was voting. Blunt said that he was not voting: 'I can get up no interest in these things. I look upon European civilization as doomed to perish, and all politics as an expedient which cannot materially delay or hasten the end'. The Cardinal agreed.

In March, Blunt paid a visit to old Lord Stratford de Redcliffe at Frant, on the borders of Sussex and Kent, where at the age of ninety-four he was living in retirement. He gave Blunt a paper advocating certain reforms for Turkey that he thought of sending to *The Times*. It was an old man's work, rambling,

vague, lacking in vigour; Blunt afterwards remarked with some asperity that 'old men should write nothing but their recollections'. Nevertheless it helped him to formulate his own ideas for Asiatic Turkey. And he was enthralled by Lord Stratford's 'old-world confessions' and reminiscences of Byron, on his Childe Harold journey, with whom Lord Stratford when chargé d'affaires at Constantinople had ridden daily for six weeks and found 'nothing at that time *scabreux* in his conversation'.

The general election came, fought largely on questions of Eastern policy. Blunt could support thoroughly neither party. With Gladstone's Midlothian campaign and his violent attack on Disraeli's policy of imperial expansion, Blunt entirely sympathized, though, even at that time he believed neither in Gladstone's sincerity, nor in the Liberal Party's backing him in foreign politics. They had no Eastern policy of their own and would fall between the two stools of a reversal of the Tory policy and a logical continuance of it. Having tried to reform Turkey and found it impossible they would probably lose their tempers and drift into war. On the other hand Lord Salisbury's policy, he felt, courted disaster for it would 'bring Germany down to Constantinople'—one of Blunt's well-founded predictions.

But in domestic policy he bemoaned wholeheartedly the overwhelmingly Liberal victory. As a country squire of Conservative traditions, he feared the Liberals would be strong enough to make 'all sorts of experiments' and 'play havoc with our British constitution'. The game laws and the land laws would go: 'and all the *palladiums*,' he wrote, 'will be dismantled.' The change in government, moreover, was upsetting to Blunt personally, for Lytton would resign with the ministry and his Indian visit of the following winter be prevented.

His fear that nothing would be done to better the late Government's Eastern policy was increased by the fact that Gladstone as Premier surrounded himself with 'ineptitudes'.

The most deplorable appointment was that of Lord Granville to the Foreign Office. 'An amiable old nobleman with a good knowledge of French,' Granville was very deaf, very idle, and his diplomacy 'of the old procrastinating school'. He was fond of saying that he believed 'in dawdling matters out'. Only in sending Lord Ripon to India as Viceroy did Blunt see any indication of a sincere attempt to carry out in office what Gladstone had preached in opposition.

'Eddy' Hamilton kept assuring Blunt that 'Mr. Gladstone's sympathies with Oriental liberty were no whit abated', and at this time appeared to feel considerable sympathy with Blunt's views. He took him to a certain Mrs. L——, one of Gladstone's 'Egerias' who lived 'in a big house in M— Square' for the purpose of indoctrinating her, and so influencing Gladstone, with the proper Arabian ideas. The visit, politically speaking, was no great success: 'she read us with much spirit a drama she has been writing about Herod, Cleopatra and Julius Caesar—sad stuff, which she assured us Gladstone admired exceedingly'.

As a bid for Gladstone's serious attention Blunt wrote in the early summer four letters to the *Spectator*, the first that he had ever written to a newspaper. In July he contributed to the *Fortnightly Review* an article entitled 'The Sultan's Heirs in Asia', in which he proposed that since a large portion of European Turkey had been divided up into independent states, so Asiatic Turkey might be divided according to the prevailing nationalities. And he appealed to Gladstone to confirm his words by using the Cyprus Convention for the good of Eastern peoples.

An invitation to Blunt to a party in Downing Street followed immediately. He had already met Gladstone and had not been impressed. He continued to be unimpressed. Arriving early, he gained twenty minutes' conversation with the Great Man in which he detailed his ideas about the regeneration of the East. Gladstone 'seemed to take an interest, as far as a man can who is totally ignorant of the A.B.C. of a question'. But he considered 'everything *critical*'. His remarks struck Blunt



‘as the reverse of profound’; and his questions ‘contrasted unfavourably’ with Lord Salisbury’s of three years before. It seemed to Blunt that he had made up his mind about nothing, and would drift on till a smash came. Blunt found some satisfaction, nevertheless, in feeling that he had succeeded ‘in grafting him with two ideas, one that the Caliphate was not necessarily vested in the House of Othman, the other that Midhat Pasha was a fool’.

His belief that his opinion ‘was of some account with Gladstone in regard to Eastern affairs’, however, may well be questioned. To say the least the constant advice and offers of aid from Blunt, a man free from political entanglements and responsibility, must have been somewhat irritating to one so profoundly enmeshed in them as Gladstone—if indeed the advice and offers always penetrated through the sagacious Hamilton to the Grand Old Man himself.

## 2

Blunt’s genuine interest in the East had made him a marked man and given him an importance welcome to his vanity. Perhaps unconsciously he ‘played up’. In any case his ideas concerning the East were given a new direction by a meeting with Malkum Khan, the Persian Ambassador. This took place one June afternoon when Blunt called upon ‘A’ and found Lord Queensberry as usual expounding his religious doctrines—‘mere Comtism’, they seemed to Blunt. Finding it difficult to array them *extempore* in orderly fashion, Queensberry took refuge in reciting a poem he had written on them in blank verse. The poem was in full swing when Philip Currie entered with the Persian Ambassador. Malkum Khan, ‘a little old man with a long nose and very black eyes’, when the poem was finished offered to tell them in his excellent French the story of a religion founded some years before in Persia and of which he had been at one time the head: ‘“It will exemplify the

manner in which religions are produced," he said, "and you will see that the doctrine of humanity is one at least as congenial to Asia as to Europe. Europe, indeed, is incapable of inventing a real religion, one which shall take possession of the souls of men; as incapable as Asia is of inventing a system of politics. The mind of Asia is speculative, of Europe practical . . . . When I was a young man . . . I founded a religion. . . . I went to Europe and studied there the religious, social and political systems of the West . . . . I knew that it was useless to attempt a remodelling of Persia in European forms, and I was determined to clothe my material reformation in a garb which my people would understand, the garb of religion. I, therefore, on my return, called together the chief persons of Teheran, my friends, and spoke to them in private of the need which Islam had of purer doctrine. I appealed to their moral dignity and pride of birth . . . . They all found my reasoning good, and in a short time I had got together 30,000 followers. Under the name of a Reformation of Islam I thus introduced what material reforms I could. To my doctrine is due the telegraph, the reorganization of the administrative departments, and many another improvement since gone to ruin. I had, however, no intention at the outset of founding a religion. The character of saint and prophet was forced on me by my followers. They gave me the title of "Holy Ghost", and the Shah that of "Reformer of Islam". I wrote a book, a bible of my creed, and enthusiasts maintained that I worked miracles. At last the Shah was alarmed at my power, which in truth had become superior to his own. He sought, in spite of our old friendship, to kill me, and my followers sought to kill him. For two months we both lived in great fear of assassination, and then we came to an explanation. I loved and revered the Shah, and I asked permission to travel . . . . I wrote to the Shah, who replied, offering me any appointment I would, so I would remain abroad; and I accepted the position of Ambassador-General to all the courts of Europe."'

So exotic a tale fired Blunt's imagination—he was, after all,

a poet—and apparently, with his usual bent toward self-dramatization, he saw himself the saviour of Islam as Malkum Khan had been of Persia. Characteristically he at once took practical steps to follow a similar course. He had already learned to respect Islam, but he had neither comprehended it nor even discussed it with anyone learned in its law or its modern thought. He now determined to study at least the main features of Mohammedan doctrine as they affected Mohammedan politics, to go to Jeddah about the time of the pilgrimage; perhaps to penetrate Arabia again, go through the Hejaz or Yemen to Nejd, for among the Wahhabis he might learn the Arabian as opposed to the Ottoman view of Islam. With a Wahhabi teacher he might devise a movement of reform, working out himself the political elements; the Wahhabi, the religious elements.

It was, as Blunt himself acknowledges, 'a sufficiently wild idea' but he took it seriously for the time being.<sup>3</sup> He put himself into the hands of a certain Sabunji who was carrying on in London an Arabic monthly called *El Nakleh* (*The Bee*), which preached religious reform to Mohammedans, on the most advanced lines of modern thought. Sabunji was well-fitted to cope with a Christian beginning an intensive study of Islam as he was of Christian origins, a member of 'one of the Catholic sects of Syria', and had been a priest before becoming a Mohammedan. Although not able wholly to trust him Blunt used him for what he was worth, first as his teacher in Mohammedan thought, afterward as secretary and finally, at the time of the Nationalist uprising in Egypt, as his emissary.

From him or from the Ambassador, Malkum Khan, Blunt first learned to understand both the historical and the modern aspects of the Caliphate question. Being opposed to Ottoman rule, what he learnt struck him as of high importance, in view of the kind of reform he was beginning to look for, and he immediately sent a memorandum on the subject to Gladstone. Hamilton's reply, he thought showed that members of the Cabinet and Downing Street in general, considered the idea

important. This encouragement inspired Blunt with the notion of going to Arabia and heading a movement for the restoration of the Arabian Caliphate. 'People have been called great,' he wrote, 'who have sacrificed themselves for smaller objects, but in this I feel the satisfaction of knowing it to be a really worthy cause.'

Definite measures must be taken. Blunt interviewed Sir Charles Dilke at the Foreign Office, the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs. He seemed to Blunt at the moment—though he was later to change his mind—a 'superior man', particularly as Dilke's questions were plain and to the point, and once he understood he took action. To Blunt's surprise, Dilke appeared to encourage his wish to go to Nejd in the autumn and even wrote the draft of a despatch to Goschen at Constantinople to forward the scheme.

The plan, however, was destined, as Blunt had expected, to fall through: on July 17th came news of the defeat of Burrows by the Afghans at Kandahar and, with it, the realization that the final blow had been dealt to Lytton and the policy of adventure beyond the Indian frontier. All the world was depressed. The Imperial fortunes of England had never seemed so low. Even Blunt, little of a Jingo as he had become, was cast down. It meant to him, moreover, the death of his cherished wish to return to Nejd entrusted with a mission, for Lytton would be recalled to England.

### 3

August 5th found the Blunts lodged at a pot-house, 'The Star and Garter' in Portsmouth, awaiting the Lyttons' return. From the windows could be seen the *Victory* and in the window over the way was a bust of Nelson. These relics of England's greatness touched him—'and Heaven knows,' he wrote, 'I am no Chauvin'—but they increased his sense of the decay of her fortunes in the past sixty years. And the daily newspapers brought him to the verge of despair. They were 'full of dastardly

congratulations at the discovery that not 2,000 but only 1,000 men were lost on the *Helmund*, and at General Burrows not having positively run away; of fears lest England should embark single handed on a war with Turkey, and an abject hope that France may think fit to see us through our difficulties in the East'.

The Lyttons' arrival was a delight. They were too happy at being again in England to be depressed by politics—'Oh, the dear drunken people in the streets!' exclaimed Lady Lytton as she came ashore, 'how I love them'. Blunt envied them their pleasure in England and the prospect of returning to Knebworth; and he envied Lytton both his consciousness that he had done his best and had done well, and his carelessness of public success.

Little as Blunt approved of Lytton's policy it seemed to him, in view of the Government's imperialistic demands to have been necessary; its execution, bold and successful. At this time he held no one man or party responsible for England's decay. But he found the Government, whichever party was in, 'a mob, not a body endowed with sense and supported by the sense of the nation'. It was no longer honest or just, and no longer made up of gentlemen. England's position in the world, he told Lytton, had been gained only by 'immense industry, immense sense, and immense honour'. These gone, 'we find our natural level'. 'For a hundred years we did good in the world; for a hundred we shall have done evil, and then the world will hear of us no more.'

Other matters than politics, however, claimed the attention of the two poets for the moment. Both were charming and fine looking and much sought after; and both had need of full private as well as public lives. They were gay dogs together. Far from being rivals, they encouraged each other in affairs of the heart. Blunt's love affairs at this and other times were doubtless known to his own circle and were not regarded as surprising. After a narrow escape from the charge of co-respondent in a well-known divorce case in 1876 he conducted them with

extreme discretion. Their history will perhaps be told when his own diaries are published in full. Meantime their existence must be reckoned with not only in personal concerns but as an incalculable influence on his public career.

Lytton persuaded him to make a new volume of poems by re-arranging his already published sonnets and adding to them the best of the sonnets omitted from the earlier book or written since 1875. The ivory-coloured volume, *The Love Sonnets of Proteus*, was published at the end of the summer of 1881 with a dedication to Lytton, and with a satiric frontispiece drawn by Blunt: an engraving of a man with top-hat pulled over his eyes and coat collar turned up against the driving rain, standing with his back to a newly made grave on whose headstone is inscribed *Hic jacet Amor Aeternus*. The Sonnets are divided into four books: 'Manon,' poems written from 1865-77 giving the story of his passion for Skittles; 'Juliet,' poems that describe a less idealized, maturer love, written chiefly in 1875 and 1876; 'Gods and False Gods,' poems to other loves and poems of reflection on Time and Death; and finally, 'Vita Nova,' in which the world opens out before the poet and he writes of impersonal things—art, strange lands, falling empires. The sonnets are his farewell to youth, the account of the loves and sufferings of his first forty years. In them he lays bare what was once his heart, acknowledging, in styling himself Proteus, 'a natural mood of change'. 'Yet, while looking back upon his feelings here portrayed as things now foreign to his life, and recognizing the many errors and exaggerations of his youth, he finds it impossible wholly to regret the past, knowing that those only are beyond all hope of wisdom who have never dared to be fools.'

The philosophy of the volume is that of the earlier *Sonnets and Songs* more fully exemplified. Blunt is a realist who faces the facts unflinchingly, depending on himself alone to find their meaning. His reading of life makes it clear why his beliefs and actions are rooted always in personal experience.

The book is less uneven than its predecessor. There are no

imperfectly achieved experiments in allegorical and narrative verse. The poetry is at higher tension, more passionate and mature. The thought is subtler, as in the sonnet

There is no laughter in the natural world  
Of beast or fish or bird. . . .  
Who had dared foretell  
That only man, by some sad mockery,  
Should learn to laugh who learns that he must die?

and in the sonnet that follows it, written at the same time, October 1876—

But I am comforted in this, that I,  
Although my face is darkened to men's eyes  
And all my life eclipsed with angry wars,  
Now see things hidden; and I seem to spy  
New worlds above my heaven. Night is wise  
And joy a sun which never guessed the stars.

Sometimes the sonnets reprinted from the earlier book have been revised, and for the better. The imagery, for example, in the three sonnets 'to Juliet, Reminding Her of a Promise', has been made more exact since the occasion of the poem was now far enough away to need no disguising:

The privet hedge  
We saw cut down has sprouted green again,  
And swallows have their nests above the ledge,  
Where we so often sat and dared complain,  
Because our joy was new, and called it pain.

has become,

The very lane  
Down to the sea is green. The cactus hedge  
We saw cut down has sprouted new again,  
And swallows have their nests on the cliff's edge  
Where we so often sat and. . . .

Again, at the end of the third sonnet, the lines

## Sonnet

I cannot love you, love, as you love me,  
In singings of soul and faith untried.  
I have no faith in my destiny,  
In my heaven even at your side.  
Our hearts are all too weak, the world too wide,  
You but a woman - If I dare to give.  
Some thought, some tendernefs, a little pride,  
A little love, tis yours, love, to receive.  
And do not grieve though now the gift appear,  
A drop to your love's ocean. Time shall see.  
- Oh I could prophesy - That day is sure,  
Though not perhaps this week-month or year,  
When your great love shall clean forgotten be  
And my poor tendernefs shall yet endure.  
Tis not the trees which make the tallest show  
Which stand out stoutest when the tempests blow.

*Love Sonnets of Proteus, XXXI*

Facsimile of Wilfrid Blunt's Handwriting





I made narration in my discontent,  
Of the wise secret . . .

in the second version read,

I made narration (it was middle Lent  
And you with Judas flowers had filled your lap),  
Of the wise secret. . . .

Apart from individual sonnets such as 'St. Valentine's Day' which is like a fresh stinging wind from the Downs, the series of fifteen sonnets, the poet's 'Farewell to Juliet', is the most interesting work in the book. They reflect Blunt's moods, of recrimination and grief, of irony, weariness and, in the final parting, controlled bitterness; and they give an impression that is unforgettable of Juliet herself, 'her sweet melancholy air of tender gaiety', her 'sad half-suppliant voice', her gentleness, her firmness. 'Juliet' is an individual and a Victorian; quite unlike the more universal 'Manon'. Among these farewell poems are the three dramatic sonnets, delightful in their Manet-like picture of the lovers' 'first word of folly' in the Beaulieu woods. The first written in 1872—the others perhaps at the same time—runs:

Do you remember how I laughed at you  
In the Beaulieu woods, and how I made my peace?  
It was your thirtieth birthday, and you threw  
Stones like a school-girl at the chestnut trees.  
The heavens were light above us and the breeze.  
Your Corydon and all the merry crew  
Had wandered to a distance, busier bees  
Than we, who cared not where the hazels grew.  
We were alone at last. I had been teasing  
You with the burden of years left behind.  
You were too fair to find my wit displeasing,  
And I too tender to be less than kind.  
Your pebbles struck me. 'Wretch,' I cried. The word  
Entered our hearts that instant like a sword.

The last is the work of a painter as well as a poet:

I see you, Juliet, still, with your straw hat  
Loaded with vines, and with your dear pale face,  
On which those thirty years so lightly sat,  
And the white outline of your muslin dress.  
You wore a little *fichu* trimmed with lace  
And crossed in front, as was the fashion then,  
Bound at your waist with a broad band or sash,  
All white and fresh and virginally plain.  
There was a sound of shouting far away  
Down in the valley, as they called to us,  
And you, with hands clasped seeming still to pray  
Patience of fate, stood listening to me thus  
With heaving bosom. There a rose lay curled.  
It was the reddest rose in all the world.

A great admirer of the *Love Sonnets*, Lytton wrote to Blunt: 'If I know anything of poetry or have any true feeling for it, they are the most genuine poetry I have read since Tennyson's early poems, and a few bits of Browning's best work.' And, in a review for the November *Nineteenth Century*, 1881, he compared them favourably with their Italian and English predecessors, defending even the liberties taken with the sonnet form and quarrelling only with certain images that seemed to him too solemn or sacred for their context. Eight years later, in the introduction to another book of sonnets, *A New Pilgrimage*, Blunt himself defended his practice of stretching the sonnet form to suit his thought and feeling, and of the use, so prevalent in his sonnets, of assonance for rhyme. Like most defences, this one made little difference to his critics: those who upheld strictness of form in the sonnet continued to carp.

The passing of time has brought about a juster appreciation of the high poetic qualities of Blunt's *Love Sonnets*. Even when first published they had 'considerable success', among the fairly restricted circle to whom they became known. Blunt was delighted—not because the success ensured his status as a poet,

but, characteristically, because 'it gave me almost at once a certain rank in the literary world which was not altogether without its influence on my subsequent relations with my political friends'. With Byronic gesture he proclaimed,

I would not, if I could, be called a poet,  
    . . . but would choose  
On the world's field to fight or fall or run.

## 4

Leaving the proofs of the new volume for Lord Lytton to correct, Blunt went off to Egypt in November 1880, to carry out his plan of studying the Mohammedan religion. In actual fact he accomplished far more than that. He laid the foundations for the intimacy with leaders of liberal thought and Nationalist action in Egypt which was to take him so far. At Cairo a young Alem connected with the Azhar, Sheykh Mohammed Khalil, made it his duty and pleasure to teach Blunt all he himself knew. Blunt later wrote of him, 'of all the Mohammedans I have known [he] was perhaps the most single-minded and sincere, and at the same time the most enthusiastic Moslem of the larger and pure school of thought'. He held with all those who professed belief in the One God—Judaism and Christianity were only corrupted forms of the true religion of Abraham and Noah—and the progress of the world toward a state of social perfection where a universal brotherhood would be proclaimed. To effect this, it was necessary to bring Islamic law into harmony with modern knowledge, a development of which it was capable if the Koran and the Traditions were rightly checked against one another. This the true interpretation of Islam, as Mohammed Khalil considered it, was the basis of the liberal reform movement among the Ulema of Cairo which had been started ten years before by an Afghan, Sheykh Jemal-ed-Din, of whom Blunt later saw much.

On January 28th, 1881, Mohammed Khalil took Blunt to

see the most remarkable of Jemal-ed-Din's disciples, Sheykh Mohammed Abdu, in his little house in the Azhar quarter. It was a day, Blunt said years afterwards, 'to be marked by me with an especial white stone, for it began for me a friendship which has lasted now for nearly a quarter of a century with one of the best and wisest, and most interesting of men'. Blunt came to know Mohammed Abdu as a religious teacher, as the leader of a movement of social reform and as a head of a political revolution; he was to know him also as a prisoner, as an exile, and under police surveillance at Cairo; and he was to see him 'by the strength of his intellect and his moral character, reasserting himself as a power in his own country'.

Mohammed Abdu wore oriental dress, the white turban and dark kaftan of Azhar Sheykhs. He was a man of about thirty-five, of middle height, active, and with singularly penetrating eyes and a frank, cordial manner. The chief tenet of his creed was a new political basis for the spiritual needs of Islam. The House of Othman for almost two hundred years had cared nothing for religion. Abdu hoped for the reconstruction of the Caliphate, explaining 'how a more legitimate exercise of its authority might be made to give new impulse to intellectual progress'. He expressed his views in a tone of moderation that convinced Blunt of their practical wisdom. Opinions so enlightened seemed worth understanding. To do so intelligently, however, and certainly before acting upon them, Blunt realized that it would be necessary to have sounder knowledge than he possessed. He set out with Lady Anne on his intended visit to Jeddah and Nejd intent upon learning all that they could teach him of the attitude and thought of their Mohammedan inhabitants.

Though he fell ill at Jeddah of malarial fever and was prevented from travelling inland by the recent appointment of a sherif of Mecca who was both reactionary and anti-European, he was able to gain the information that he sought. He found that he could learn more of modern Islam at Jeddah in a week than in a year elsewhere, for the very shopkeepers

discoursed of things divine and even the Frank Vice-Consuls prophesied. The vigorous life, the practical hopes and fears of nineteenth-century Islam, and above all its reality as a moral force, astonished him. 'I left it interested, as I had never thought to be, in the great struggle which seemed to me impending between the parties of reaction in Islam and reform, and not a little hopeful as to its favourable issue.'

On their return from Jeddah to Ismaïlia the Blunts were met by discouraging letters from Hamilton. He gave little hope that the Liberals would take any steps forward in Eastern policy beyond, perhaps, strengthening and opening up Greece. Blunt was not in the least interested in Greece; indeed, on first reading the letters, he was annoyed that Hamilton should have written so much about it. But, as usual, all was grist to his mill. Possibly, if Gladstone encouraged a rising on the Greek frontier, he might encourage at the same time one in Western Arabia. With renewed zeal Blunt set off to discover the present state of affairs in Syria.

Crossing the Suez Canal to the Sinai Peninsula, he and Lady Anne struck eastwards over a long track of sand-dunes, to a very little known hilly region called Jebel Hellal, where they made friends with four Bedouin tribes, including the very Azazimeh with whom they had nearly had an encounter five years before over the well water.<sup>4</sup> These tribes now besought the Blunts to help their sheykhs who had been treacherously captured and carried off to prison in Jerusalem by the Ottoman Government. The Blunts were always ready to oppose the strong in favour of the weak, even at expense to themselves, and, no doubt, also enjoyed playing the part of benefactors. They found the sheykhs at Jerusalem. 'The sight of these unhappy prisoners,' wrote Blunt in the *Nineteenth Century*, September, 1882, 'men of high birth and honourable life, lying in their filth with scores of common criminals in the worst dungeon in Syria, moved me to compassion, and I registered a vow that I would devote a share of my energies thenceforth to the cause of freedom for the Arab race.'

Neither at Jerusalem nor at Damascus, where the Blunts spent much time and trouble on the affair, were they able to effect the sheykhs' release. As a last resort Blunt wrote to Goschen, the British Ambassador to the Porte, begging him to interfere and pointing out that England might need the friendliness of the tribes south-east of Gaza if ever in time of war she found it necessary to secure the Suez Canal. Possibly this suggestion brought the sheykhs their long-awaited release; whether or not, it was remembered, as Blunt later believed, by the British Government in a way not at all to his liking. During the Egyptian Nationalist uprising, in the summer of 1882, an English secret agent (Edward Palmer) was sent precisely to those tribes whom Blunt had befriended to draw them by the use of Blunt's name, into alliance with the British against the Nationalists whom Blunt himself was supporting. 'I was, therefore,' he wrote, 'as they say, unworthily, "hoist with my own petard".'

The affair of the sheykhs disposed of, Blunt's mind reverted to his interest in an uprising among the Arabs. Syria and all the Arabian frontier seemed to him to be in a state of political ferment pushing toward a pan-Islamic movement. Were England to give her support, an Arabian Caliphate might be established and the old Seyyid Abd-el-Kader, who had given Blunt help at Damascus in regard to the imprisoned sheykhs, might be made Caliph. Not unnaturally, the English Government showed little enthusiasm for such a plan when it was broached to them. The Blunts were constrained to deal 'merely about horses' with their friends the Anazeh Bedouins, whom they accompanied northwards to Aleppo before sailing home to England in the early summer.<sup>5</sup>

Their winter's experience Blunt summed up in *The Future of Islam*, written at Crabbet at the end of the summer of 1881.<sup>6</sup> In it he committed himself 'without reserve to the Cause of Islam as essentially the "Cause of Good" over an immense portion of the world', and urged England to support Islam if only for the sake of the large proportion of Moslems in India.

The French invasion of Tunis, he thought, heralded not only the break-up of the old temporal power of Islam, but a liberal reformation that would bring to Islam a new spiritual as well as a new temporal power. It would destroy the Sultan's claim to the Caliphate; the seat of the Caliph would be moved to Cairo, then to Mecca, or once for all to Mecca. This change in the Caliphal seat and the problem of protecting pilgrims to the holy cities of Arabia were two matters of prime importance to Mohammedans. It could hardly be doubted, Blunt wrote, that if England refused to take an interest in them 'some more resolute neighbour' would do so, for Islam, roused by Tunis's fate to a sense of its political and moral dangers, looked to some strong European power for support. Abandoned by England, Islam would become an enemy who would make the dream of reconciling the Indian population to English rule for ever an impossibility.



## EGYPT

## I

No sooner was *The Future of Islam* off Blunt's mind than he started again for Arabia. He had come to look upon it 'as a sacred land, the cradle of Eastern liberty and true religion', little suspecting that his chief interest in Islam was to lie henceforth not there but in Egypt. Happening to go up to Cairo for a few days, he became so absorbed in the Egyptian political muddle that he remained for several months.

During his previous year's visit he had been delighted to find his old acquaintance, Sir Edward Malet, established at Cairo as Consul-General and had accepted Malet's version of conditions unquestioningly. He had even viewed the Khedive, whom Malet took him to see, with optimism, thinking him 'if not very interesting, at least holding the language of a civilized and liberal-minded prince [who would] with proper management . . . go straight'. This rosy view of Egypt's ruler was quickly changed in 1881 when Blunt came to know Sheykh Khalil El Hajrasi of the Azhar, a man of some importance and an intimate friend of the army as well as of the civilian leaders. From Sheykh Khalil and through Sabunji, who accompanied Blunt as secretary and who had 'a real genius' for ferreting out the news of the moment, he soon obtained a very different account of the events of the past summer from that given by Malet and the other English officials and by visitors to Cairo.

The accession of Mohammed Tewfik to the Khedivial throne in 1879, Blunt learned, had been greeted with hope by all those who had been working in Egypt for a constitution, as well as by the foreign governments. But Tewfik was weak and,

brought up by his mother in the harem where she was a mere servant and he of small account, was well versed in all the habits of insincerity and dissimulation which in the East, as Blunt pointed out, are the traditional safeguards of the unprotected. Between reformers wanting constitutional government and consuls and comptrollers 'forbidding him to part with any of his power, a power they intended to exercise in his name themselves', he shilly-shallied in a lamentable manner.

The point of attack in his conspiracies was the army, which had become, and continued to be, the centre and source of disturbance. It was rent by legitimate grievances and by jealousy between the fellahin, most of whom were common soldiers, and the Circassians,<sup>1</sup> from whom the officers were chiefly drawn. The leader in this army class feeling was, as early as 1877, Ahmed Bey Arabi, a Lieutenant-Colonel, but a fellah.

To the fellahin Arabi symbolized all that was best in themselves. He became their champion, talked of far and wide as 'El Wahhid'—'the only one'. Gradually even the Constitutionalists, many of them Circassian civilians, came to look to Arabi as a positive force through which to obtain their ends. They wished for a constitution under which the supreme power should be a Turco-Circassian oligarchy; Arabi wished the supreme power to be vested in the people. But both saw that in order to acquire a constitution at all, they must join forces. Gradually the two parties became one—the 'Nationalist' party.

By devious ways the Khedive embroiled Arabi and the other fellah army leaders in a quarrel with the Prime Minister, and on September 9th, 1881, Arabi, supported by the army, marched to Abdin Palace, voiced their complaints to the Khedive, and obtained all their demands. The next morning the country awoke to learn that not merely a revolt but a peaceful revolution had taken place. On September 9th, arbitrary rule had ended.

Foreign Office reports and the English Press had led Blunt

to believe the revolution a purely military one; and he shared 'with most lovers of liberty a distrust of professional soldiers as the champions of any cause not that of tyranny'. Now he had the satisfaction of finding the ideas vaguely foreshadowed by him in *The Future of Islam* 'as a dream of some few liberal Ulema of the Azhar, already a practical reality'. A liberal reformation of Islam had begun at Cairo. All native parties, including the whole population of Cairo, not excepting the Khedive, seemed united in the realization of a great national ideal.

Drawn into sympathetic discussion of possible reforms with his native friends, Blunt was soon called upon to enter the political arena himself; the students of the Azhar, dissatisfied with their leader, the Sheykh El Islam, recently installed by the Khedive, feared that he had the support of the English officials at Cairo, and begged Blunt to use his influence with Malet in their favour. He found Malet not only ignorant of the whole affair but prepared to say that the religious disputes of the Ulema were outside his province. The students, reassured by this news, forced the Khedive to accept another Sheykh El Islam.

This small service on Blunt's part gave the Nationalists confidence in him. They asked him to delay his departure and see them through their further difficulties. He readily consented. His sympathies were genuinely aroused and, of course, the position of intermediary between the Nationalists and the English officials satisfied both his pride and his imagination.

He saw much of Malet during the weeks of December and January and was able to clear up 'many small misapprehensions' between him and the Nationalists. Though Malet was not then unsympathetic with the Nationalists, he was singularly ignorant. All he had to go upon was what Sherif Pasha, the one Nationalist whom he knew personally, and the Khedive, and his own Greek dragoman who picked up news at the cafés of the European quarter, chose to tell him. He was, moreover, in 'terrible perplexity' concerning the wishes of the English

Government. It was a relief to him to find in Blunt one who could suggest a policy.

In accordance with a faith soon to be relinquished, Blunt believed that Egypt could not manage herself by herself: 'It will be a great misfortune,' he wrote, 'if such protection and supervision as the Government gets from England should be withdrawn, at least for some years and until a new generation has grown up used to a better order of things than the old.' But it was clear to him that Egypt was on the right road and that the only possible line for England to take was that of supporting the Nationalists. He impressed upon Malet his opinion that when Gladstone 'came to know the facts he *must* be on the Constitutional side'.

Blunt's doings as unofficial intermediary were watched with interest by English visitors to Cairo. The fascination which he had exercised upon those around him in youth had grown more apparent with his increased self-confidence. Wherever he might be eyes were drawn to him, his movements were watched, his words listened to—whether with sympathy or scoffing depended largely upon his will, for, though he could effectively exert himself to charm, he did not scruple to show indifference or rudeness when he felt like it. Now in the winter of 1881 he presented a picturesque and occasionally surprising figure in his intent preoccupation with 'native' ways and ambitions. Certain of his friends among the visitors upheld his views, particularly Sir William and Lady Gregory.

Before this time Lady Gregory had taken little interest in politics. Through her friendship with Blunt formed during this winter in Egypt, a friendship that was to last for forty years, she became a strong partisan of the Egyptian Nationalists, and, except for Lady Anne, perhaps the firmest ally that Blunt had during his work for them in England in 1882-83. In after years he was wont to say that he had educated Lady Gregory in politics: as indeed he had, if only by overcoming her self-distrust and engaging her interest in Egyptian Nationalism. Her husband, Sir William Gregory, had done

remarkable work as Governor of Ceylon in building up happy relations between the ruling and the subject peoples, and he had before this upheld the causes of small nations. During 1881 he supported in every way, and particularly in letters to *The Times*, a view of the Egyptian situation similar to Blunt's own.

Lord Houghton, too, was at first sympathetic with Blunt's attitude. In fact by mid-December, Blunt wrote later, 'I had succeeded in bringing round nearly all the English element at Cairo to my view of the case. Even Sir Auckland Colvin, the English controller of Egyptian finance, professed himself converted and half-inclined to come to terms with the revolution'—a conversion that was to prove short-lived.

On December 12th Blunt met Arabi for the first time. He was taken to the Pasha's house by mutual friends and accompanied by Sabunji as interpreter. Arabi received him cordially. In appearance he was a typical fellah, tall, heavy-limbed, somewhat slow in movement. He had little of the alertness of the soldier, more of the deliberation of gesture and courteous dignity of the village sheykh. In repose his features were dull, his eyes abstracted like those of a dreamer, but when he smiled and spoke 'one saw the kindly and large intelligence within'.

Arabi had already heard of Blunt as a sympathizer with the fellah cause, and was interested in Blunt's family connection with Byron for, although he knew nothing of Byron's poetry, he honoured his work for liberty in Greece. Arabi talked frankly about all the questions of the day. He clearly 'did not wholly trust' the Khedive. Both to him and to the Dual-Government of France and England, however, he expressed loyalty so long as they did not interfere with national regeneration. He made a distinction between the Ottoman Government, from which he would brook no interference in the internal affairs of Egypt, and the religious authority of the Sultan that he was bound to obey. In response to Blunt's explanations of Gladstone's views, he agreed that England rather than France

was to be looked to for sympathy, but he distrusted Malet—a point upon which Blunt tried to ease his mind.

The Nationalist leaders' attitude impressed Blunt favourably. Arabi's words 'went to the root of things and fixed the responsibility of good government on the shoulders which alone could bear it'. 'I felt,' Blunt wrote in 1907, 'that even in the incredulous and trifling atmosphere of the House of Commons words like these would be listened to—if only they could be heard!'

With Mohammed Abdu and the other civilian leaders, Sabunji acting as scribe, Blunt drew up a manifesto of the Nationalist Party's views. He sent it, with the approval of both army and civilian leaders, under a covering letter to Gladstone, and, on Sir William Gregory's advice, so that it could not be pigeon-holed and overlooked in Downing Street, to *The Times* as well. Chenery, the editor of *The Times*, published it with a leading article and approving comments.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately he stated that Arabi had written it, an inaccuracy enabling Malet, who had objected from the beginning to its being sent to *The Times*, to dispute its authenticity. Its reception, nevertheless, was good, for it was moderate, frank and logical, well calculated to win approval. That Europe any longer should misunderstand the situation in Egypt seemed impossible.

But at Cairo a new difficulty had arisen in which Blunt's aid was again requested. In view of the Khedive's promise to enlarge the army to the maximum allowed by the Sultan's firman, the Nationalist Minister of War, Mahmud Bey Sami, demanded a large increase over the 1881 budget of the War Department. The financial control felt that they could not give it; yet refusal might cause a new military demonstration. At this impasse Colvin called upon Blunt to find out what sum would satisfy the army and to explain that he objected not to the army's but to the budget's increase.<sup>3</sup>

Again Blunt was successful in the office of mediator: Arabi and the officers agreed, on Blunt's assurance that Colvin's word could be trusted, to withdraw their demands. They

promised 'to have patience and make no further armed demonstrations'—a promise that they kept.

Malet thanked Blunt for having helped him and Colvin out of a considerable difficulty. But in his dispatch to the Foreign Office—which, obtusely enough, he showed to Blunt—he mentioned merely Blunt's encouragement of the Nationalists and complained of his having sent the Nationalist manifesto to *The Times*. Never a word did he say of Blunt's work on behalf of the English officials. Not unnaturally Blunt spoke his mind. Malet cancelled the despatch and wrote another, somewhat repairing the injustice. The incident served, as it was bound to do, to add to Blunt's support of the Nationalists the spur of a personal mistrust of the English officials at Cairo.

For some weeks, however, he continued, although 'always with a feeling of possible betrayal at Malet's hands', to give what help he could to the Agency.<sup>4</sup> At first the political horizon seemed fair: the Chamber of Delegates had been summoned to discuss the promised Constitution; Arabi had been made Under-Secretary of War; the British and French Agents appeared to look favourably on the prospect of a Parliament. All that was necessary to insure steady progress was a declaration by the Foreign Office in frank support of the Nationalist policy already in train. Blunt fully expected it to be made.

Instead of such a declaration the English and French Governments promulgated a joint note on January 6th, 1882, in which they assured the Khedive of their support, and encouraged him to quell any uprising against his proper authority.<sup>5</sup> Blunt was shocked. The obvious meaning of the document was that the powers would support the Khedive against the Nationalists.

Soon after its arrival he went to Malet. Malet gave a long explanation of how the note might be understood as favourable to the Nationalists, and asked Blunt to persuade Arabi to accept it as a friendly demonstration. The attempt was futile: 'Sir Edward Malet must really think us children who do not know

the meaning of words', was Arabi's reply. He went over the note step by step, making Blunt, who had been sceptical from the first, feel that 'in truth Malet's explanation was nonsense, and I a fool before Arabi and ashamed of having made myself the bearer of such rubbish'. But he said only that he had delivered the message as Sir Edward had given it, adding, 'He asks you to believe it . . . and I ask you to believe him'.

The Joint Note united the Egyptians in jealously guarding what they considered their rights. Its promulgation coincided with the drafting of the new organic law that was to define the power of the Representative Chamber in the promised Parliament. The majority of the delegates thought that they, as representatives of Egypt, should dispose of that part of the budget which concerned internal affairs, leaving to the foreign Financial Comptrollers, as guardians of foreign obligations, the care of that other part which dealt with the public debt. This seemed reasonable enough to Blunt. The Financial Comptrollers, however, insisted upon retaining the right that they had exercised for the past two years of drawing up the whole of the yearly budget. Again Malet and Colvin called upon Blunt to patch matters up. They primed him with their arguments and arranged for him to meet a group of the delegates for a private discussion. He could only persuade them to incorporate a few modifications in the law. On the main point they were immovable.

Nationalists on the one side, foreign agents—with the exception of the French Minister—and English Colony on the other, were now adamant in opposition. In the first volume of his *Secret History* Blunt reported a conversation with Colvin on the last day of January which opened his eyes to the attitude of English officials at Cairo and caused him to warn the Nationalists to expect armed intervention. Some time earlier Colvin had remarked to him, in regard to the duplicity of Orientals, that 'an Englishman who knew the game . . . could always beat them at their own weapons, and they were children in deceit when it came to a contest with us'. Now he said of



the Egyptian Nationalists that 'he had thought them amenable to reason, but he found them quite impracticable, and he would do his best to ruin them if ever they came into office'. Intervention, he argued, was 'necessary and inevitable' and 'he would spare no pains to bring it about'. To Blunt's expostulation that such action would mean war, Colvin replied that he 'understood it in that sense' and that 'war meant only annexation'. He made no secret of his view that 'England would never give up the footing she had got in Egypt and it was useless to talk about abstract rights and wrongs of the Egyptians. These would not be considered'.

At the end of a half-hour's hot argument, Blunt said, 'I defy you . . . to bring about English intervention or annexation'. In his diary he noted his fear that he had added to Colvin's political opposition a personal animus, that 'it had become a trial of strength between us'. Whether or not his fear was justifiable as far as Colvin was concerned, it points to the probable effect of the conversation on himself. Political and personal antagonism always interacted in forming Blunt's mind.

An event now took place which confirmed Blunt and the British officials in their mutual distrust. Early in February the Prime Minister, Sherif Pasha, and the President of the Delegates, Sultan Pasha, who had thrown in their lot with the Foreign Comptrollers in the quarrel over the budget, were forced to resign. The Delegates elected a new ministry that was entirely Nationalist, in which Mahmud Pasha Sami was Prime Minister and Arabi Minister of War. On the face of it the quarrel seemed to have ended in a Nationalist victory. But in England and in Europe reports were circulated by *The Times* and by Reuter's Agency that the Deputies had demanded Sherif's overthrow only under threat from the army and that Sultan Pasha had resigned only at the point of Arabi's sword. In foreign public opinion the Nationalists were discredited.

The Press reports were, as far as Blunt could discover, ill-founded. At Sultan Pasha's request he wrote a long letter—

never printed—to *The Times* contradicting the reports, and conveyed Sultan's emphatic denial to Malet who had repeated the story in his dispatches and had telegraphed it to Gladstone. Malet at first insisted on the truth of the tale, saying he had got it from Sultan Pasha himself; then he said that he had got it at second hand from Sultan; and finally, pressed further, he lost his temper and said that Blunt had no right to cross-question him.

Blunt now had become estranged not only from Malet and Colvin but from most of the English Colony and was living in a camp on the desert at Heliopolis enjoying what, he said, he had 'always loved best, life in the open air'. The Gregorys were among the few who continued actively to sympathize with him. Lady Gregory described a visit to the Blunts made during this time with Mrs. Fitzgerald and Lord Houghton—who, though now politically disaffected from the pro-Nationalists, derived considerable pleasure from witticisms at their expense and could not resist picturesque entertainment: 'they [the Blunts] received us in Bedouin costume at the doors of their tent. Mr. Moore and two or three Arab sheykhs to luncheon—first sweets, nougat, etc., then incense burned and coffee—then a bowl of boiled lamb, and one of rice and coloured water. W.S.B. said the chief sheykh is not what he would call a robber, but ravages the villages near him.'

It seemed to Blunt that he could be of greater use to the Nationalists by returning to England to act as their mouth-piece than by remaining in Egypt. If news was to be distorted or cut from whole cloth in the foreign Press some independent source of information was needed to enlighten the English Government and public opinion. Blunt still believed that the Government would uphold the Nationalists if it could but hear 'the truth'—a belief that was strengthened by a letter that he received from Gladstone towards the end of February answering his own letter sent six weeks before with the Nationalist Manifesto. 'I feel quite sure,' Gladstone wrote, 'that unless there be a sad failure of good sense on one or both, or as I

should say, on all sides, we shall be able to bring the question to a favourable issue. My own opinions about Egypt were set forth in the *Nineteenth Century* a short time before we took office'—in an article, 'Aggression on Egypt', denouncing the policy of intervention—'and I am not aware as yet of having seen any reason to change them'.

When Blunt showed Arabi this letter, Arabi begged him to tell Gladstone that he and his fellow ministers sought 'a friendly understanding with the English Government'. But he complained of Malet and Colvin and asked what Blunt thought were the chances of a conflict. Blunt, remembering Colvin's remarks, said that he considered the danger a real one. He himself intended 'to preach the cause of peace and good will but he felt that he could not do otherwise than advise Arabi . . . to stand firmly to his ground'. The best chance of peace was to be prepared for defence, he argued, since the financiers, who were behind all Egypt's difficulties, would be loath to urge a war that might ruin their own interests. He quoted to Arabi Byron's lines, 'Trust not for freedom to the Frank', of which Arabi highly approved: and promised that if the worst came he would return and throw in his lot with the Nationalists in a campaign for independence.

Egyptian bonds and property had begun to go down. As a final gesture of confidence in the Nationalists before leaving Egypt, Blunt bought from the Domains Commission for £1,500 a garden of forty acres on the edge of the desert beyond Heliopolis about ten miles from Cairo. He had camped outside its walls the year before on the way to Syria and wondered at its beauty with the apricot trees in full flower. To Sheykh Obeyd, as it was called from the small tomb of a local saint of that name within its walls, Blunt was to return for many winters. The memoirs in which most of his Egyptian experience was recounted were written in one of its shady walks. Its charm lingered in his memory, making him feel the more strongly that Egypt was his 'second country'.

## 2

When Blunt arrived in England on March 5th, 1882, the Government was absorbed in its Irish difficulties. Most of the great Whig leaders were for strong measures in Ireland and had come to look upon 'Nationalism' in whatever country it might be found as a byword and reproach. On the other hand Gladstone, Blunt heard, far from being annoyed by his interference in Malet's diplomacy, was obliged to him both for his action and for his letters. And in the public mind his and Sir William Gregory's letters had invested the Egyptian Nationalists, particularly Arabi, with a halo of romance that secured at least a hearing for further ideas about them. Blunt found that he was able personally to command 'considerable attention'.

For advice as to how to make use of this good start he went to his cousin 'Button' or Algernon Bourke, the younger son of Lord Mayo who had been Viceroy of India, and nephew to the Right Honourable Robert Bourke, afterwards Lord Connemara, who was leader of the Tory Opposition in the House of Commons on all questions of Foreign Politics. Button was a 'young man of fashion, closely connected with the official world', and intimate with people about the Court and in high financial circles. He was also connected with the Press, being 'on the staff of *The Times*, not as a writer, but as an intermediary for Chenery, the editor, with political personages'. Largely because he saw in them possibilities of creating a stir, he supported Blunt's views. 'Scrapes' and unorthodox political intrigues were the breath of life to Button. Nevertheless his advice was often astute. From his superior heights of worldly wisdom he warned his cousin not to trust in Eddy Hamilton's optimistic view that 'armed intervention with Mr. Gladstone in power was an impossibility'. He advised him, whilst continuing his present friendly relations with Downing Street, to talk to everyone he knew in

Parliament and to write letters to *The Times* in order to drum up sympathy. If a sufficiently strong public opinion could be aroused, enough pressure might be put upon the Government to keep it in the way that Blunt, and Button also, felt it should go.

Advice to take immediate action of such a personal kind of course appealed to Blunt. He began at once to follow it by enlisting the sympathy of George Howard and his wife, later Earl and Countess of Carlisle. Mrs. Howard, one of the Stanley sisters who had tried long ago to instil into Blunt liberal opinions, was a strong Gladstonian and urged him to trust implicitly in the Prime Minister. Her husband, less sanguine, was inclined to agree with Button that other reliance was necessary. He took Blunt to the Lobbies of the House of Commons, where he was henceforth to be a frequent visitor, and introduced him to various political personages who promised assistance. Somewhat later, in 'February' of 'the Idler's Calendar', Blunt wrote: 'Under the Speaker's Gallery'—

In all the comedy of human things  
What is more mirthful than for those, who sit  
Far from the great world's vain imaginings,  
To mingle in its war of words and wit,  
A listener here, when Greek meets Greek, Fox Pitt,  
At question time in the Queen's Parliament?  
'Tis the arena of old Rome.

The first rebuff to Blunt's progress was administered by his cousin Philip Currie, later Lord Currie, at the Foreign Office. To Currie, full of Malet's complaints, Blunt's Cairo doings seemed merely a 'large practical joke at the expense of the Foreign Office'. But it was difficult to withstand Blunt's combined energy and charm. His disapproval melted under the fire of Blunt's arguments and he arranged meetings for him with Granville and Dilke for the next day.

On his way to the East in November Blunt's earlier favourable opinion of Sir Charles Dilke had received a rude shock.

He had met him in the London-Paris train, and learned from him something of the manœuvres leading to the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty which, as one of the British Commissioners, Dilke was negotiating with Gambetta. It had seemed to him then that Dilke meant to persuade England to fall in with Gambetta's repressive Egyptian schemes in exchange for Gambetta's signature to the Treaty; and the Joint Note to Egypt had marked, in Blunt's mind, Gambetta's and Dilke's success. He was not surprised, therefore, in March to find Dilke hostile to the Nationalists, although he was startled by the absurdity of Dilke's chief complaint: that the Nationalists had spent half a million sterling on the army. Since the Nationalists had been in power only six weeks this mistake, if not the impression its publication created, was easily corrected.

Lord Granville's equally ill-founded statement that 'the whole thing in Egypt was an intrigue to restore' the deposed Khedive Ismail, was harder to deal with. Blunt found Granville 'singularly urbane' but settled in his opinion that the Egyptian difficulties must end in the Nationalists being put down by force. Clearly the only way to move the Foreign Office would be to bring pressure to bear from without. All Blunt's hopes for the future centred upon the Prime Minister. 'I must see Gladstone,' he wrote.

Up to this time, from a feeling of loyalty to men who had been his friends, he had made no public complaint against Malet or Colvin. But when news came on March 13th that the French Financial Comptroller had resigned and there seemed to be a chance that Colvin might be made to do likewise, Blunt felt it imperative 'to tell Gladstone all the truth about them'. He drafted a letter including Arabi's messages both of goodwill towards the English Government and of complaint against the British officials, and his own suggestion that a Commission of Inquiry be sent to Cairo to examine into the situation in a friendly spirit, the only spirit that could possibly avert danger.<sup>6</sup>

The letter was followed by the much desired interview with the Prime Minister. At 11.20 on March 22nd Blunt entered the Great Man's presence to find him looking better and younger than two years before, and to be most kindly received. His letter was lying on the desk before Gladstone who was evidently eager to hear what he had to say. Blunt talked with eloquence, encouraged by the Prime Minister's sympathetic manner and little needed request 'to tell him all'. 'I could see,' he wrote later, 'that every word I said interested and touched him.' Gladstone's sympathy, he felt, was 'obviously and strongly' with the Nationalist movement.

When Blunt had told his view of the part played by the army in the movement and the feeling of the Nationalists towards the Sultan and the Viceregal family, Gladstone asked if he had said all this to Granville. Blunt replied, 'He stopped me at the outset by telling me that Arabi had been bought by Ismail! What could I say?' Just at that moment Granville was announced. Gladstone went out with a look of annoyance but, to Blunt's relief, returned almost at once 'with a sort of skip across the room and rubbing his hands together as one might do on having got rid of a bore'. The gesture gave Blunt confidence. He delivered Arabi's messages about the slave trade and other reforms and explained the mutual suspicion between Malet and Colvin on the one side and the Egyptian Nationalists on the other which made pacific development impossible. Whereupon Gladstone remarked, 'almost pathetically, "What can we do? They are esteemed public servants and have received *honours* for their work in Egypt".'

As he left, Blunt asked if he might send Arabi some message in return for those he had brought. Gladstone thought an instant, then said, 'I think not', and, very slowly and deliberately, 'in a sort of House of Commons voice': 'But you are at liberty to state your impression of my sentiments. . . . If they wish to judge of these, let them read what we say in Parliament, especially what I say, for I never speak lightly in

Parliament. In our public dispatches we are much hampered by the opinion of Europe, which we are bound to consider, and this is not favourable to liberal institutions in Egypt. But they should read our speeches.' His voice became natural again as he thanked Blunt for his letters and for all that he had told him and begged Blunt to let him hear if any new combination arose. Gladstone's extreme kindness as he shook hands moved Blunt greatly: 'I was near shedding tears, and went away feeling that he was a good as well as great man, and wondering how anyone with so good a heart could have arrived at being Prime Minister.'

The Gladstone whom Blunt saw that day was 'a man of infinite private sympathy with good, and of whom one would affirm it impossible he should swerve a hair's breadth from the path of right.' Alas, there was another Gladstone: 'the opportunist statesman, who was very different from the first, and whom I was presently to see playing in public "such fantastic tricks before high Heaven as make the Angels weep".' In March 1882, though occasionally sceptical of Gladstonian pieties, Blunt had not yet read his Gladstone as he was destined to read him. Directly after the interview he wrote to his Cairo friends: with Gladstone on their side, 'what more was there to fear?' All that was needed was for them to be patient till a Commission of Inquiry was sent.

If his belief in the possibility of influencing Gladstone had the drawback of leading Blunt to rely too implicitly on Hamilton's reassurance and advice, it gave him the necessary faith to carry through many weeks of feverish activity. Everywhere, at luncheon and dinner parties, at interviews, at formal meetings—of the Asiatic Society, for instance, to which he had just been elected—Blunt spoke of Egypt. He was in great demand since his talk provided entertainment if, for many people, nothing more serious.

He was also much sought after as a source of information, imparting news to and from the Nationalists with whom he



was in constant correspondence. From a talk at the Horse Guards about military routes into Egypt and other Egyptian matters with Sir Garnet Wolseley, who said that he had been consulted two or three times during the winter as to an immediate occupation of Egypt, Blunt gathered that any advance on Cairo would be made by way of Ismaïlia. He passed on the warning to Sheykh Mohammed Abdu. Through Button he was brought into touch with 'Natty' Rothschild, for whom he drew up a memorandum on the Egyptian situation as it affected finance.

Too often his activities met with discouragingly little success. He laboured in vain to persuade John Morley to exclude from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, of which Morley was then editor, articles that contained material defaming the Nationalists;<sup>7</sup> and again in vain with the manager of *The Times* who objected on the score of needless expense to sending out a special correspondent to Cairo for independent news: 'English people,' said the manager, 'had only two interests in Egypt, the Suez Canal and their bonds, if they held any' and the views of the regular correspondent 'on these two matters were what they wanted. Beyond this they did not care in any special way for the truth.' It was slight comfort that he complimented Blunt on his letters, and said that *The Times* would be glad to print whatever more he had to say.

Lady Gregory, who supported Blunt ardently during this time, had a like answer from Chenery, the editor of *The Times*, when she asked him why he allowed his Egyptian correspondent to supply so incorrect an account of all that was happening there. 'Chenery said, "I will tell you. It is because of the influence of the European bondholders over *The Times*".' 'When I told Sir William,' Lady Gregory wrote, 'he said, "Don't tell that to Wilfrid Blunt, or he will have sandwich men walking with it down Piccadilly to-morrow".'

## 3

By the time that Parliament reassembled after the Easter recess the situation in Egypt had changed: the Nationalist ministry was again at loggerheads with the Khedive and the English officials, this time over the fate of the conspirators in the recently discovered 'Circassian plot'. Soon the situation in England itself changed still more disastrously. The Phoenix Park murders which took place on May 7th confirmed English distrust of Nationalism, and alienated even Gladstone's sympathy.

At the moment Blunt did not realize the full import of the atrocity. He saw only that political attention was distracted from Egyptian problems and, still with faith in Gladstone's good will, he tried to recall it by sending the Prime Minister an 'ultimatum': 'I have said that I must speak the whole truth if Lord Granville won't.' In reply he received a note from Hamilton which dissuaded him from making at once his exposition of the state of Egyptian affairs by the assurance that in Parliament two days hence Granville intended to show that Liberal policy 'would be in accordance with Liberal doctrine'. Hamilton's assurance, as so often proved to be the case, was open to various interpretations. Blunt not unnaturally seized upon the one corresponding with his hopes only to hear in Granville's speech a repetition of the old threatening policy of the Joint Note. 'This then,' he wrote, 'was the famous Liberal policy Hamilton had promised me. I felt myself absolved from all obligation of reticence toward Gladstone, who seemed to have played with and deceived me.'

Something, he determined, must be done at once to frustrate the Government's reactionary plans, above all their intention of dispatching a fleet to Alexandria in support, it was evident, of the Khedive. If it could be shown that the Egyptians were strongly united in what they considered a just cause surely English Liberals would support them rather than

the Khedive. Retiring to Crabbet he spent a restless night in plotting. In the morning he sent off on his own responsibility eight telegrams to various Egyptian leaders designed to bring replies showing what he believed to be the truth, that the civilian leaders and the army stood together firmly with the people behind them in opposition to the Khedive.<sup>8</sup> He knew that so independent an act would arouse the anger of the Foreign Office and bring on a violent commotion of which he would be the centre. And, sincerely believing himself to be in the right, he awaited the storm not without a certain fearful pleasure. The actual result, however, was more than he bargained for.

At dinner that evening a satisfactory reply came from Sultan Pasha, the Prime Minister. Blunt at once repeated the message in wires to Gladstone and, for publication, to *The Times*. On the way to London the following day, he received other answers in the same vein. The morning papers announced that on the preceding afternoon the Khedive, through Sultan Pasha's mediation, had forgiven Arabi. Blunt had 'won a first diplomatic victory'. Gladstone's two private secretaries congratulated him and, with what savoured of inter-departmental rancour, advised him to write another formal letter to press home his triumph over the Foreign Office on the ground of its false information. Hamilton even said that the twenty pounds the telegram had cost ought to be paid out of the Secret Service fund.

But rejoicing was premature: the Sheykh El Islam and the Egyptian Prime Minister recanted—falsely and under intimidation, Blunt was sure. Button, who was enjoying the fray even more than his cousin since he had no serious interest in its outcome, advised him to publish a full account of the proceedings in two letters to Gladstone, one written in triumph, the other in defeat. The letters were no sooner prepared than Hamilton dissuaded him from publishing them announcing, despite his enthusiasm of the previous day, that he thought the telegrams unfortunate. He said that in any case the fleet

was being sent out to Alexandria merely to protect English subjects and that no violent action of any sort was meditated. Under his influence Blunt sent his servant David to stop the publication of the letters.

It was not long before he regretted this action bitterly. When the letters finally appeared a month afterwards it was too late for his explanation to make any impression. The *St. James's Gazette* already had spoken of him as an incendiary. Other journals had followed suit. 'Their language,' Blunt thought, 'reacted on the Government and doubtless also on Gladstone, though he knew the truth which the public did not.' Blunt continued to visit Downing Street, but did so on a less and less intimate footing. Suspicion had been aroused on both sides.

Socially, his position of rebellion against the Foreign Office added savour to his life. He enjoyed to the full the ironies that the situation brought with it. Not long after the telegram affair the Blunts, arriving for a week-end with Lord Portsmouth, Lady Anne's cousin, at Hurstbourne, found themselves, to their mingled horror and delight, fellow guests of Lord and Lady Granville. All the other guests were sympathetic with the Nationalist cause—when Granville was not present—especially J. R. Lowell, the American Ambassador, who throughout the summer always supported Blunt's views in conversation. Granville himself was amiable, talking pleasantly to Blunt of every subject except Egypt and telling a number of particularly neat stories. Later, when a card arrived from Lady Granville inviting the Blunts to a Foreign Office party on June 3rd 'to celebrate the Queen's birthday', Blunt wrote exultantly: 'I shall keep this as an answer to Harry Brand's charge of treason.'

Politically, the telegrams were not so successful. They had failed signally to calm the Egyptian situation. From the arrival of the French and English fleets at Alexandria on May 20th events moved for the worse. Lord Granville's permission to Malet to act as he thought fit resulted in the

ultimatum of May 25th issued by Malet and Sienkiewicz, the French Consul, demanding the resignation of the Ministry and Arabi's retirement from Egypt. When two days later word came that Arabi had resigned, it seemed clear to Blunt that the Egyptians would have to fight. He felt that he 'ought to go out and join them'. The thought that he had not gone while there was still time to patch matters up tormented him. Arabi, he knew, was not a strong man of action. He was a 'humanitarian dreamer with little more than a certain basis of obstinacy for the achievement of his ideals'. He needed advice and, especially, support in action. Besides, little as Blunt wanted actually to fight even for the Nationalists, he had promised to do so. Doubtless the possibilities of leadership made a certain romantic appeal to him: perhaps in his mind he drew a parallel with Byron's history. It was a relief all the same when he learned that Arabi had been reinstated as Minister of War 'with something like dictatorial powers' and there seemed hope of a peaceful settlement.

Lest he should miss this second chance of acting as mediator he decided to make the plunge into the heat of a Cairo June. Under Mrs. Howard's Gladstonian influence he set forth his pacific intentions in a letter to the Prime Minister. The letter is long and detailed, idealistic, but not un-barbed. Its general trend is clear from the last sentences: 'My idea of a policy for the Egyptians is, that they should act by a rule diametrically opposite to the common Oriental ones. I would have them tell the truth, even to their enemies—be more humane than European soldiers, more honest than their European creditors. So only can they effect that moral reformation their religious leaders have in view for them.'

Perhaps not altogether for the worse this time, Hamilton again interfered. Blunt's position in Egypt, he said, his known connection with Gladstone, 'would be misunderstood, and make a terrible row'. On the strength of Hamilton's promise that there would be no intervention and no troops would be landed, Blunt agreed not only not to go but also to wire

Arabi: '... Do not fear ships. No intervention. Issue public notices in every town for the safety of Europeans.'

Had Blunt heard the speech he was destined on the following day to hear fall from Gladstone's lips in Parliament undoubtedly he would not have renounced his journey. The Prime Minister made the 'astonishing statement' that Arabi had 'thrown off the mask' and threatened to depose the Khedive and proclaim Halim, Tewfik's cousin, Khedive in his stead. The only possible basis that Blunt could discover for this statement was a telegram from Malet recording a rumour which the Khedive himself had said that he hardly believed.<sup>9</sup> 'Yet,' Blunt observed, 'on such slender rumour Gladstone who had declared to me he never spoke lightly in Parliament and had bidden me wait for his spoken word in the House of Commons as a message of good-will to the Egyptians, fires off, to give point to his speech, this quite untrue announcement, his first definite utterance since I had seen him on Egypt. . . . It is a curious commentary on the ways of ministers and the processes of the Gladstonian mind.' Its effect on Blunt was complete disillusionment. 'Never after this,' he wrote, 'did I place the smallest trust in him, or find reason, even when he came forward as champion of self-government in Ireland and when I gave him my freest support, to look upon him as other than the mere Parliamentary he in truth was.'

## ARABI'S TRIAL

## I

SINCE he had promised not to go out to Egypt himself, Blunt dispatched Sabunji in his stead and through him succeeded in influencing Arabi and the other Nationalist leaders almost as directly as though he had been at Cairo in person. As Blunt's representative, Sabunji was received with open arms by the Nationalists and given their entire confidence. Although he turned out later to be something of an Oriental scallywag, he was heart and soul with their movement and at this time proved not unworthy either of their trust or Blunt's: he communicated Blunt's letters faithfully to the Nationalist leaders and their letters to Blunt.

Doubtless seeing that things were coming to a head, the English Press began to show a more intelligent interest in Egyptian affairs, many of the papers sending out special correspondents. News from Egypt, to Blunt's relief, began to be more often accurate. Even in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which in general continued its old fire-eating policy, a strong article appeared against intervention in Egypt by Frederic Harrison, 'the soundest and most courageous man on foreign politics then in the Liberal party' Blunt thought, 'and by far the most vigorous pamphleteer'. Harrison was quite disinterested personally, his opinions sprang in great part from other sources than Blunt's and his methods were often different, but their connection in work for the Nationalists was henceforth fairly close.<sup>1</sup>

And there was need of much work during the next weeks. While Blunt was spreading the good tidings sent by Sabunji

in early June that Arabi had the country behind him, the whole character of the situation changed again; open hostilities broke out. On the morning of June 11th, at Alexandria, a small quarrel sprang up between some Christians and Moslems. It might have been quieted easily had the Governor allowed the police to intervene. Instead, he egged on the quarrel till it grew into a riot in which a certain number of Europeans lost their lives, amongst them a petty officer of H.M.S. *Superb*, and the English, Italian and Greek Consuls were injured. The whole disturbance was quelled only by the arrival of the regular troops, whom the Governor, on one pretext or another, had put off calling in.

The riot caused considerable alarm in England. In his diary for June 12th Blunt noted: 'Just as we were leaving James Street, Lady Malet rushed in wildly, demanding of me the truth of what I had been doing in Egypt. I told her pretty nearly. She said my honour was at stake in clearing myself of the charge of intriguing against my country. She besought me to calm things down there; and I promised to send a message to Arabi not to touch a hair of her son's head. . . . She told me people said I had been in conspiracy with Gladstone against her son's policy in Egypt. I assured her that Gladstone was guiltless of my telegrams, and that I accepted the full responsibility of all I had done. She made me promise to come and see her; but—such are the miseries of public life—she looks upon me as Edward's murderer.'

To Blunt the riot did not seem to be necessarily of an alarming nature, and a reassuring wire came from Sabunji. It seemed as if, after all, war might be averted. In reality, he wrote later, 'henceforth it was a losing battle, though I fought it out to the end'.

Blunt himself was worn out. He looked altered, Mrs. Howard, who met him in the Park observed. Added to the fact that sleeping or waking he had not had Egypt out of his head since the crisis began three days earlier, he now received a telegram of foreboding from Sabunji ending, 'Recall Malet



for God's sake. All curse and will murder him if he continues.' Remembering his promise to Lady Malet, Blunt impressed the danger on Hamilton sufficiently to have Malet ordered aboard ship.<sup>2</sup>

A subsequent wire from Sabunji gave further evidence of profound disturbance. The riots were being falsely fathered on the Nationalists. He requested information about the policy of Gladstone and Granville. Blunt, who had been asked by Hamilton not to return to Downing Street, since his visits there were remarked on and created an awkward situation, passed on the request by letter. Hamilton's answer, as might be expected, was hardly satisfactory.

On June 23rd, a letter from Blunt in *The Times* created a great sensation. He had written it to Gladstone and published it by Frederic Harrison's advice and with the approval of the Howards, even of the Gladstonian Mrs. Howard. In it he somewhat cleared up his own position, recapitulating his connection with Malet and Colvin and the missions that he had undertaken for them. He pointed out that the British officials, both misinformed and misinforming, were largely responsible for forcing the Egyptians into hostility towards England. And he besought England to use the Conference of great European powers which met for the first time on that very day as an opportunity of acknowledging past mistakes and expressing sympathy with Egyptian freedom.<sup>3</sup>

The letter 'called down a storm of abuse on my head from Malet's and Colvin's friends, and generally from the jingo and financial elements in the Press and Parliament.' *The Times* published an angry letter from Sir Henry Malet, the Egyptian Consul's brother, to which Blunt, hating to quarrel with old friends, returned a soft answer. Lord Lamington gave notice of a question in the House of Lords as to Blunt's 'unofficial negotiations' and on June 26th made an indignant speech against Blunt. The Government, not unnaturally, was embarrassed by questions concerning Blunt's unofficial negotiations as it had fallen into similar difficulties in its Irish

policy the year before by using W. V. Errington to communicate unofficially with the Pope. Granville, Blunt thought, looked white and uncomfortable during the debate. But he admitted that Blunt on one occasion had acted to pacify the Egyptian army—a fact that Sir Henry Malet had denied. Colvin's alternative denials and admissions of having received help from Blunt made the imbroglio more intricate. Blunt's own reaction to all this was characteristic: 'The more talk the better.'

News of a quarrel between the British fleet and the Nationalists over the fortifications at Alexandria began to appear in the papers. On July 6th word came that Admiral Seymour had sent an ultimatum to Arabi, and Blunt wired Sabunji: 'Avoid meddling with the fleet. Send Abdu with a message to Gladstone. Patience.' Blunt was not sure that he had done wisely in sending such advice, but comforted himself with the thought that 'prudence is certainly on the right side.'

The situation grew more critical; Admiral Seymour demanded the surrender of the forts in terms impossible for Arabi to accept; Lord De La Warr asked Blunt to telegraph the Nationalists advising a compromise. Blunt refused. The Egyptians could not, he felt, honourably give up their forts. If England forced war, war it must be. With forlorn hope of stemming the tide he sent a copy of his Downing Street correspondence to the Prince of Wales—he had already sent copies to Cardinal Manning, Lord Dufferin and James Knowles, editor of the *Nineteenth Century*.

On July 11th the bombardment of Alexandria began. By July 13th the forts had been silenced; but there were no signs of Egypt's yielding. It was too late for any sort of prevention. Alexandria had been evacuated by the Egyptian army, was in flames and undergoing a new massacre by roughs.<sup>4</sup> Blunt was thankful that the army was 'safe out of the mouse-trap', and by his advice, he thought, entrenched out of reach of the guns.

On July 14th Blunt received a letter that he was asked to communicate to Gladstone. As he explained to the Prime

Minister it had been dictated by Arabi to Sabunji at Alexandria and neither signed nor sealed by the Egyptian leader—a circumstance that allowed Arabi later, when charged with having written the letter, to deny it, and that caused Blunt to be taunted by his enemies with having forged the letter. It was a firm statement of the Egyptian position: the Egyptians would not, unless attacked, wage war and they felt that war was unnecessary, that, with good will on both sides, a compromise might be reached; but if attacked, they would defend themselves to the utmost of their ability and would regard the defence as in the nature of a religious war. *Punch's* remark on this letter was: '*The Times*, last week spoke of some portion of Arabi's letter to Gladstone Pasha as a "blunt announcement". Taken as a whole, it might have been termed a "*Wilfrid Blunt* pronouncement".'

Through Button, Blunt learned that the Prince of Wales wished for a copy of the letter. He accordingly sent him one. It possibly strengthened the Prince's faith in the 'very good authority' which he wrote to Lord Granville on July 31st he had for believing that 'Arabi was in receipt of confidential intelligence and encouragement from England'. 'Blunt,' he wrote, 'was not merely sending out secret intelligence, but was about to join Arabi with some £20,000, which he had raised by the sale of his jewels and furniture. "Can nothing be done," the Prince asked, "to stop this disloyal and eccentric Jesuit? People are beginning to speak very seriously of his conduct, and no wonder."'

In reality, feeling that as a member of the besieging nation he could do no more, Blunt retired to Crabbet to stay until the struggle was over, and spent a sad summer writing his 'Apologia' for the September number of the *Nineteenth Century*. He took no hand in the Egyptian War except in so far as by past deeds or indirect participation he may be said to have effected it. His timely suggestion of a probable attack on Egypt from the Suez Canal side, he felt, had prompted Arabi to dig the lines of Tel-el-Kebir so that the Nationalists were

prepared for resistance there when Wolseley occupied Ismaïlia on August 21st. He helped in a small measure to defeat the Nationalists by unwittingly aiding Palmer, the Agent of the English Government, in the work of bribing the Bedouins of the Sinai peninsula; but of this he did not know until some time later when Palmer's diaries were put into his hands and, ironically, in the interests of justice, he felt called upon to defend Palmer and try to extract recognition and remuneration for the family of their agent from the English Government. During the war he made no attempt even to advise the Nationalists.

Such abstinence was difficult for his fellow countrymen to believe in. When a Reuter's telegram announced that seventeen cases of firearms had been found at Sheykh Obeyd, they attacked him in the Press. The seventeen cases were in reality a box of seventeen rifles and revolvers and one small brass cannon that Blunt had intended to take to Arabia in 1881 and had stored and forgotten at Sheykh Obeyd when the journey was abandoned. Ten years later his cousin Colonel Guy Wyndham took him to view the arsenal on the Cairo citadel where he came upon the box and, with no difficulty, had it restored to him. In the summer of 1882, however, it served as proof in England that Blunt not only talked a great deal of traitorous nonsense but actually supplied the enemies of his country with firearms.

## 2

On September 13th the Nationalists were decisively defeated at Tel-el-Kebir. Many years later Blunt wrote in the 'Quatrains of Life':

Here lay the camps. The sound from one rose clear,  
A single voice through the thrilled listening air.  
'There is no God but God', it cried aloud.  
'Arise, ye faithful, 'tis your hour of prayer.'

And from the other? Hark the ignoble chorus,  
Strains of the music halls, the slums before us.

Let our last thought be as our lives were there,  
Drink and debauchery! The drabs adore us.

And these were proved the victors on that morrow,  
And those the vanquished, fools, beneath war's harrow.

And the world laughed applauding what was done,  
And if the angels wept none heard their sorrow.

Three days after the victory *The Times* announced the capitulation of Cairo and Arabi's surrender to Drury Lowe. At the same time it published a telegram from its Alexandrian correspondent, Moberly Bell, who had always upheld Anglo-Khedivial views, demanding 'exemplary punishment' for eleven of the Nationalist leaders including Arabi. Blunt again came forward—this time for the campaign with which his name is most often connected, the defence of Arabi.

His first act was to wire Button asking for news of the official attitude toward the prisoners. On receiving an unsatisfactory reply, he wrote asking Hamilton to let him know should the prisoners be in danger of death. Hamilton fobbed him off with a casual note. Whereupon Blunt wrote direct to Gladstone, pointing out the difficulties of obtaining a fair trial for the prisoners and saying that he and some of his friends, at their own expense, proposed to secure the services of competent English counsel for the principal prisoners. He would, he said, esteem it a favour if he were told as early as possible what would be the exact nature of the trial and what the principal charges made.

Even with all his experience of Gladstone it seemed impossible to Blunt that the Prime Minister from whom he had received two communications, one of them within the last weeks, condemning atrocities, would not approve his humane attitude. He feared only that Arabi himself might refuse his assistance as more damaging than helpful since he had probably been told that Blunt was quite out of favour with the

Government. Whatever the event, the trial filled Blunt with apprehension. 'We are the rearguard of a beaten army,' he wrote, 'where there are plenty of blows and no glory to be won. As to Cairo, what I cared most for in it is gone beyond recovery. Egypt may get a certain share of financial ease but she will not get liberty, at least not in our time, and the bloodless revolution so nearly brought about has been drowned in blood.'

It was in no optimistic frame of mind that, on Lord De La Warr's advice and with Button's approval, Blunt arranged to send A. M. Broadley out to Egypt as defender of the Nationalist leaders. Broadley, a man of much ability and well informed on Eastern matters, had been a practising lawyer in the Consular Courts at Tunis, and latterly, *The Times* correspondent there. He was now to return to Tunis to await the instructions to proceed to Egypt that Blunt intended to send him as soon as the consent of the Foreign Office could be obtained. It was useless for any counsel to go out to Egypt without governmental authority. He would be helpless, probably even unable to see his client.

Button then rendered the cause great service by managing an adroit private venture, not even making it known to Blunt until it was accomplished. He inserted an announcement in *The Times* on September 20th that Arabi and his companions were not to be executed without the consent of the English Government and that they would be defended by efficient counsel. He possessed not the slightest authority for this; but, *The Times* having made the statement, the Government found it difficult to go back upon so humane a decision publicly attributed to it.

At the moment, however, Button's move, inexcusable in itself, worked no noticeable good. Blunt could extract no satisfactory reply from the Government, despite the fact that he pressed the matter as was his wont in several letters to Gladstone. Again with Lord De La Warr and Button, he agreed to send out to Egypt at once the first briefless barrister

he could lay hands on 'to act as circumstances should suggest', until Broadley arrived there. They combed the Inns of Court and hit upon the Hon. Mark Napier, the best agent, Blunt thought, that they could possibly have found for their purpose. He was resourceful, a determined fighter, had a good knowledge of law, and spoke French fluently—a necessary qualification for Cairo. And, as the son of a former British Ambassador, he was little 'likely to be imposed upon by the prestige and mystery with which diplomacy is invested for outsiders and which gives it so much of its strength.' Taking a cipher code, two or three letters of introduction and a handbag, he started that night by the Brindisi mail for Alexandria.

Napier arrived at Cairo on October 6th to find that the sole and very weak protection offered the prisoners was the appointment by the English Government of two Englishmen who had a knowledge of Arabic to be present at the proceedings. Luckily they were honest, humane men, old acquaintances of Blunt: Sir Charles Wilson, with whom the Blunts had travelled from Aleppo to Smyrna in 1881, and Ardern Beaman whom they had known at Damascus and who was, at the time of the trial, Malet's interpreter at the Cairo Agency. As they were favourably impressed by Arabi's dignified bearing these two men gave Napier what help they could. But Napier himself could get nowhere. His applications to see Arabi went unanswered, shuffled back and forth between Malet and the Egyptian Minister of Interior.

On October 12th Blunt received a sudden warning from De La Warr, who was still in communication with the Foreign Office, that unless vigorous steps were taken Arabi's life was in extreme danger. Blunt hurried to Button and with him agreed that a supreme appeal must be made to public opinion; the Foreign Office must be directly attacked and Gladstone compromised and forced into a declaration of policy. In an open letter to the Prime Minister—the only means of attack at hand—he pilloried both Gladstone and Granville. Button 'plumped' it into the next morning's *Times* where Chenery

'generously' gave it prominence and directed attention to it in a leading article.

The Foreign Office capitulated then and there. It admitted the necessity of a fair trial and instructed Malet to withdraw from opposition and treat counsel sent to Arabi favourably. Blunt thought that Bright, learning the truth from his letter, had gone to Gladstone and told him plainly that he, Gladstone, would be disgraced through all history as a renegade from his humane principles if he permitted an unfair trial. Or perhaps the revelations likely to be brought out in the trial by English counsel terrified both the Khedive and the English Governments. In any case the supreme point of danger was passed.

But Blunt's life was no easier. Only the first round had been won; and by most of his compatriots he was looked upon at best as a sentimental mischief maker, at worst as a traitor. His one-time sympathetic supporter, Lord Houghton, remarked: 'The fellow knows he has a handsome head and he wants it to be seen on Temple Bar'; Lord Houghton was 'quite rabid about Egypt' and observed to Lady Gregory that he wished 'Arabi and Blunt had been shot'. Sir William Gregory, unlike his wife, had for some time ceased to uphold Blunt; in a long letter to Sir Henry Layard after the battle of Tel-el-Kebir he wrote, 'I view all these things differently from Blunt, who pushes things to first principles, but,' he added generously, 'I think that Blunt deserves great credit for the bold and indefatigable manner in which he has fought this battle almost single-hearted. He has fought for Egypt alone, I have fought for England first and Egypt also.'

This attitude, that to fight for Egypt was to war against England, was hard to shake. To Blunt, to fight for Egypt was to try to bring England to her senses and save her from future discredit and difficulty. 'Let me ask my countrymen,' he wrote later in the *Nineteenth Century*, 'to believe that . . . I have been fighting the battle not only of truth and justice, but also of what I conceived to be distinctly my own country's



interest. . . . It has been to prevent a crime that I have laboured—alas, in vain!’ That his pleasure in the paradox obscures for the sober-minded both his sincerity and the soundness of his reasoning, in no way detracts from its justice, or, in the long run, its expediency.

The anxiety of the Queen as shown in her correspondence of this time with her Prime Minister reflects what all felt whose point of view was limited by temperament or circumstances. In a letter of October 14th, from Balmoral, to Gladstone, she wrote: ‘It seems to the Queen that we are acting vy strangely . . . There is of course nothing to be said against his [Arabi’s] having a fair trial as any other Oriental but it seems to the Queen as if all the *delay* wh is being caused by this great anxiety to facilitate his defence by an Englishman (!!!) will do incalculable mischief—& we may see fresh disturbances break out in Egypt if the *English Govt* & a small portion of radicals & others in England actuated by a morbid sentimentality—appear to be so intensely interested in a Man—who betrayed his sovereign & is *certainly indirectly* if not even directly the cause of the loss of life of so many Europeans on the 10th of June—in the burning of Alexandria & in the false use of the flag of truce?’

Unlike Lord Houghton, who had written that if he went to Egypt, Blunt must be sure to bring back Arabi to dine with him, the Queen continued her letter with the cutting observation: ‘The Queen feels sure that Mr. Gladstone cld not wish this nation to stultify itself by allowing Arabi—if acquitted of the worst crimes for wh he is to be tried, to come here and be *lionised* and made a Hero of—as Cattawayo was.’<sup>5</sup>

She quite overlooked in her arraignment of Arabi the fact that he had led his people not in rebellion against his sovereign, the Sultan, or against the Khedive, but in a defensive war against a nation that had no sovereign rights over the Egyptians and that had made war on them for—from the Egyptian point of view—its own gain.

## 3

While feeling rode high in England against Blunt's endeavours, at Cairo things began to go prosperously. Broadley, who arrived on October 18th, was admitted with Napier to Arabi's cell on October 22nd and got from him the ground work of a strong defence. Important papers and letters, hitherto concealed in Arabi's house, were brought to Broadley, News of their discovery struck panic to the Khedivial Palace. Broadley, a past master in the art of treating with journalists, with the assistance of lavish hospitality at Blunt's expense, soon had the correspondents with whom Cairo was swarming under his thumb.

Granville at this point took, as Blunt remarked, the wisest course open to him in view of the general muddle: he entrusted the whole matter to Lord Dufferin for settlement. Learning from Button of this new move, Blunt sent off a long letter of instructions to Broadley, urging him, since the defence held the trump cards in Arabi's documents, to stand out for nothing less than honourable acquittal. True to character he wanted no compromise.

Broadley's and Napier's communications and more than all a letter from Ardern Beaman gave Blunt every hope of success. Beaman seemed a witness of unimpeachable authority. He had had charge of the Cairo Agency during Malet's absence in the last two weeks before the bombardment, where being a good Arabic scholar, he had learned to know the situation thoroughly. The Government had set its seal upon his integrity by naming him to be present at the trial. He had now resigned from his post as English interpreter of the British Agency in order to devote himself during the remainder of the trial to the service of the prisoner's defence and had been able by way of Wilson, whose eyes he had opened, to convince Malet of the error of his opinions. Malet, even against his own interests, now was helping those who acted for the Nationalists. Dufferin

too, seemed gradually to become favourably disposed towards the defence.

Letters and telegrams flew between Blunt and the Cairo defence as they continued until the end to do. Blunt spent himself in writing advice and exhortation to the barristers and in whipping up enthusiasm in England by the only means open to him, the usual letters to *The Times* and personal conversation. He gained a certain number of adherents for, as A. W. Kinglake observed, 'there is a fire about Mr. Blunt which must command a following'. But he was doomed once more to disappointment. After the first few weeks of high, if intermittent, hope, compromise again loomed on the horizon. Word came from the barristers that though they could disprove other charges against Arabi, they could not with any certainty disprove his complicity in the burning of Alexandria.<sup>6</sup> If Blunt held out for acquittal they foresaw a long and exceedingly expensive trial which, should public opinion and the unreliable Foreign Office turn against them, might result in Arabi's being found guilty and executed.

With no financial aid it was impossible for Blunt to assume the responsibility of a long and vexed trial, for the cost of proceedings even up to this time had been high—Broadley's bill already ran to £3000. Clinging to his belief, however, that honourable acquittal was the only just solution of Arabi's fate, Blunt, much as he disliked doing so, asked in *The Times* for subscriptions. The plea brought many valuable names to his assistance and a gratifying number of sympathetic letters; General Gordon wrote characteristically: 'Don't mind being abused, don't mind being praised; you remain yourself after it all.' Only £200, however, was subscribed in actual money. Beyond that sum Blunt was obliged to pay the entire cost—which, in the interests of justice, he did ungrudgingly. Commended for it by a friend in later years, he remarked, 'and have I eaten a chop the less?'

Not only was it now financially impossible to run the risk of long drawn-out legal proceedings, but De La Warr, Button

and the others who up to this time had firmly supported him advised compromise. With extreme reluctance Blunt wired the barristers his consent to their making what settlement they could so long as they did not agree to internment for Arabi. When Broadley's telegram came saying that the sentence of exile to some place to be settled on by Blunt and the Foreign Office, with a suitable allowance and compensation for loss of property, could be obtained for Arabi and the other leaders if they would plead guilty of rebellion and that amnesty would be granted to the majority of the Nationalists, Blunt capitulated. 'Have consulted De La Warr,' he wired, 'we approve full discretion on basis of telegram just received.'

The Foreign Office had gained what it most wanted: admission of rebellion to justify intervention. With Lord Dufferin's aid the trial was carried through successfully on December 3rd. The next day Broadley wired: 'Arabi delighted at result and sends thanks . . . Dufferin brick,' and added with evident relish: 'Anglo-Egyptian Colony furious.'

Owing chiefly to Blunt's efforts, Arabi and his fellow prisoners had escaped not only with their lives, but with partial freedom.<sup>7</sup> The place of Arabi's exile was easily arranged: the Island of Ceylon, 'the traditional place of exile of our father Adam when driven out of Paradise. . . . No more honourable one could possibly have been fixed upon'.

But Blunt could not rest. The exact terms of the arrangement come to with Dufferin were committed to writing by neither him nor Broadley, thereby causing later much trouble and misunderstanding. A worse oversight was the failure to define the promised general amnesty. Moreover, Lord Dufferin's long awaited dispatch published at the end of his mission at Cairo was a deep disappointment—'a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel', commented Lady Gregory. It recommended, Blunt said, merely 'that mockery of self-government, a consultative assembly without initiative, without legislative power, and without control over ministers. . . . no change was to be made in the restored

Circassian regime, Tewfik was to be retained with a new lease of confidence from the protecting powers, and the development of free institutions which were hinted at were to be left to the tender mercies of their bitterest enemies. The sole alternative to such a poor chance of good was that sketched in the dispatch where the possible control of a "masterly Resident" was named'. The whole recommendation read to Blunt and other pro-Nationalists like a bitter jest.

Again Blunt took up the cudgels, making his chief occupation in 1883, as it had been in 1882, the effort to procure justice in Egypt. The struggle, carried on throughout both winter and summer was hard; meetings at his house in James Street and elsewhere, and letters to *The Times* occurred almost daily. The political strain was made doubly great by the discovery that Broadley had acted with duplicity in various respects, and by Beaman's unaccountably disavowing his favourable attitude.<sup>8</sup> By this double-dealing, defences and charges on several important points were lamentably confused and only with difficulty at least partially straightened out.

Repeatedly word came to Blunt from Egypt of illegitimate imprisonments and hangings in punishment of trumped-up charges. In connection with the case of Suleiman Bey Sami, charged with the burning of Alexandria, Blunt and Lord Randolph Churchill worked together for the first time: 'thanks especially to Churchill's energy that summer', Blunt wrote, 'and to the great publicity he was able to give the Khedive's connection with the riots, I have the satisfaction of remembering that we succeeded at last in putting a stop to the worst barbarities of the restored regime at Cairo, nor was any further political hanging after that summer permitted as long as Gladstone remained in office'.

## 4

By the end of this Egyptian experience Blunt had become a confirmed anti-Imperialist. He summed up the iniquities of Imperialism in 1882 in *The Wind and the Whirlwind*—‘the real monument of that time’, Lady Gregory thought—a rapidly moving and somewhat strident ‘diatribe in verse’ that none the less carries the conviction of sincerity in the heat of battle and ‘still stands as an indictment and a prophecy’. No man believed more strongly than he in close relations with other nations or races, or put his belief more often into action, but henceforth he was a ‘Little Englander’. Imperialism had come to mean to him the desire of a powerful nation for self-aggrandizement at the expense of the more admirable qualities of both ruled and ruling nations.

As he wrote later when discussing his attitude toward Irish affairs, his point of view was essentially ethical in its basis: ‘Christianity acknowledged at least this right to the weak races of mankind, that they had their place in the general scheme of things and equality in God’s sight with the most efficient’. He agreed with those who based their political views on the teachings of modern science, he said, only to the point of being himself a convinced evolutionist, of believing that ‘the world of living beings has been slowly evolved from the lowest to the highest forms, and that we men have a genealogic kinship, to go no farther, with all vertebrate life’. Unlike some of those who held the same point of view, he interpreted this as meaning that ‘between the races of mankind the kinship is here close, there distant, but it is only a difference of degree, and if we have any moral duty towards our fellow men all must be included in it. . . . The natural law appealed to by an imperialist does not show attacks made by race on race as practised in the animal world. The struggle to live resulting in the survival of the fittest is not in nature between species and species, but between individuals of the same species, nor is it

decided by appeals to force or superior cunning, but by the power of endurance and adaptability to environment. There is nothing in non-human nature, at least among warm-blooded vertebrates, comparable at all to our wars and our combinations to despoil and exterminate. These are essentially human vices, growths of the natural world, which apart from them is a world of mutual concession and unbroken racial peace. There is nothing in Darwin's teaching really to suggest the contrary, or to excuse the modern rule of race selfishness and organized colour aggression'.

There was another aspect of the case not less convincing to Blunt, which, 'for want of a better adjective', he called, 'the aesthetic': 'the natural world', he wrote with a bias almost Wordsworthian, 'is one everywhere of beauty, of health, of happiness. Of beauty because of its variety; of health, because of its conformity to type; of happiness, because of its suitability to its surroundings. To my view of things the insistence of a single race, be that race my own or another's, to usurp more than just that limited space in the world for which it is best fitted, is an insolent pretension sanctioned by nothing in the natural law and violating its harmony. . . . The world would be a poor misshapen deformity were it planted from pole to pole with a single crop of wheat; and how valueless will it have become, according to any canon of beauty, when the Anglo-Saxon rule of order and law shall have overspread both hemispheres—which may God forbid—and established over them its debased industrialism, its crude cookery and its flavourless religious creed'.

Forms of government did not concern Blunt except in so far as they were acceptable or not, to the people governed. If the people were content with their government, it might take any form whatsoever. He was strongly in favour of the Government of Nejd under that autocrat of autocrats, the Emir Ibn Rashid; on the other hand, many years later, he condemned the Democratic Government of the United States of America since it neglected to suppress the lynchings of negroes, a large

part of its population. He opposed the Khedivial Government not because it was autocratic, but because it was sustained only by foreign powers and then re-imposed by England against the will of the Egyptian people—Arabs, Copts, even many Circassians. Whether or not he upheld the people as a whole, apart from the individuals among all classes who were his personal friends, because he loved them, affects the consistency and sincerity of his point of view no more than does the allegation, often brought against him, that on his own estates and even in his own family he himself was a complete autocrat. It may readily be admitted that he was—but what dissension arose, sprang from other causes than the fact of his autocracy.

His point of view was supported at too great cost to himself to have been the outcome merely of vanity or egotism. It was held neither lightly nor sentimentally. From a sound basis of experience it developed logically step by step: his finding, during his journey through Asia Minor in 1873, that Eastern ways of government had something to recommend them; his recognition in Nejd in 1879, of the happiness which a nation, however poor in material ways, might attain to if left to itself without foreign interference; his discovery, in Iraq during the same year, of the disastrous results brought about by corrupt foreign rule of a weaker, poorer nation; his suspicion, aroused at Simla in 1879-80, that the value to India of the paternal government of England was in large measure sham; his conviction induced by the study of Islam in 1880, of the possibility of a progressive liberal movement in Islam; and the final death, in the disillusionments of 1882-83, of his faith in the disinterestedness of the English Government.

In view of these disillusionments and the conviction with which a man of his temperament holds his beliefs, it is not wholly surprising that Blunt should have taken every opportunity of showing up all that redounded to the discredit of those who held, and acted upon, an opposite opinion. They seemed to him both stupid and inexcusably wicked. Despite his years in the Diplomatic Service, he had little understanding of the



political web in which politicians find themselves enmeshed. Certainly he had no patience with it. He saw the issue as a question of right and wrong, of English honour and Egyptian liberty against English financial greed and official weakness. He was never able to compromise and obligations undertaken by the Government, measures made necessary by the pressure of political expediency, which drew the Government from the course that seemed to him morally and ideally right, were to him obligations and measures that the Government should avoid or ignore.

But, though Blunt's sincerity is obvious and though his scorn of the political game is understandable, it is impossible not to suspect that he enjoyed the excitement and importance both of being at the centre of the fray and also of stirring it up.

For human nature is an earthy fruit,  
Mired at the stem and fleshy at the root,  
And thrives with folly's mixon best o'erlaid,  
Nor less divinely so, when all is said.

In a measure at any rate, his scorn of opponents was owing to personal pique and, having thrown in his lot with the Nationalists, he was forced by pride to win their—his—success. He delighted in catching out his adversaries in unfortunate situations, in collecting stories of their social failures, their less happy attempts at literary and artistic pursuits, and their unflattering photographs. The pleasures of irony often led him too far. And undoubtedly he was susceptible, though not blind to flattery. Perhaps, also, his attitude toward those whom he supported savoured too strongly of the beneficent lord and master.

Many of Blunt's contemporaries, who were not unnaturally irritated by his thrusting himself unofficially into official business, saw only these less admirable aspects of his political work. His very enthusiasm rendered him suspect. The multiplicity of his gifts and interests, such as might have been esteemed in a man of the sixteenth century, were regarded with suspicion by his nineteenth-century contemporaries with their

tendency to specialization. His position in society, more especially his relations with women; his tall slender figure, proud head and piercing eyes—he was reputed one of the four most beautiful men in England—and his subtly modulated voice; even the perfection of his dress and his affectation in private of Arab robes, detracted from his weight in politics. And with this seeming frivolity went his habit of returning to first principles for the solution of political tangles: a fantastic juxtaposition.

The impression got about that his words were not trustworthy. Probably they were as trustworthy as anyone's; few politicians, however honourable they may otherwise be, escape misrepresenting the case at one time or another for the sake of expediency or denying what they know to be the fact.<sup>9</sup> It was perhaps excusable if Blunt used the weapons granted his adversaries in gaining what he considered to be of vital importance—and all too natural that, against vested interests, he should have failed. In any case, in politics his contemporaries used him and also his information when it served their turn, though they seldom acknowledged it and seldom either directly followed his advice or accepted his judgment.

As the Egyptian war recedes and its political consequences fall into perspective, Blunt stands out as a man who fearlessly put into action in the field of foreign politics the professed moral beliefs of his fellow Englishmen, stripping away the sham defences that divorced them from practical politics, sparing himself neither odium nor expense of any kind.<sup>10</sup> To many of the ever-growing number of people who are more and more sternly questioning the policy of pre-1914 days, fundamental justice may well seem to have been on Blunt's side; and ultimate expediency may also appear to have lain in the ways which he advised following.

Blunt himself later was not sure that he had been right in urging Arabi and the other fellah leaders to stand firm even against war. Yet he could not repent of it, for the attention paid to fellahin grievances after that time, he thought, was the

result of Arabi's persistence fostered by himself. England had been obliged to listen to the complaints of the Nationalists and ultimately to remedy most of their material wrongs. Material prosperity was not synonymous with the well-being of the nation. But, since the native population had been able to hold its own against foreign intrusion as owner of the soil, the nation would remain alive and in time might obtain self-government. And then, he wrote, 'the armed struggle of 1882 will appear to them in its true light as the beginning of their national life, and one, as such, glorious in their annals.'

If he sometimes questioned his part in bringing on the Egyptian war, he never ceased to regret that England had not supported the Nationalists rather than the Khedive. Arabi and the other Nationalist leaders alone had shown themselves capable of ruling Egypt peaceably since they, not the Khedive, had the country behind them. Had they been given English protection they would have developed a state strong enough to hold its own and willing to work in friendly accord with English interests. In backing the wrong horse England had discredited herself and had set the stage to her own ultimate disadvantage, incurring a vast expenditure of money, energy, and anxiety in a hopeless task.

His own apologia is what he called advisedly the 'Secret History Series', of which the first, *The Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt*, centres about the Egyptian war of 1882. He took for granted the reader's knowledge of other, and particularly official histories, intending his book to supplement and correct them. It is based on personal experience, hearsay, conversations, letters, reflections, gathered up to the time of its publication in 1907; and it is composed chiefly of excerpts from his dairies which, in order to give the contemporary *mise-en-scène* intentionally contain much that is not political. Being a personal and vivid narrative of his own life during 1881-82 it is lively reading even for those uninterested in Egypt, and creates an unforgettable impression of its author.

## CEYLON, INDIA AND THE SOUDAN

## I

UNDISCOURAGED by his political struggle of the past two years, Blunt made up his mind in 1883 before publishing a history of the Egyptian revolution and the intrigues which had ruined it, to visit first the Nationalist exiles in Ceylon, and then, in order to round out his knowledge of the Islamic situation, Mohammedan India. On the way he, and Lady Anne who was to accompany him, would pass through Egypt. A few days before starting he was called on in James Street by Sir James Knowles, editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, and one of Gladstone's friends. The Prime Minister, Knowles said, was thinking of recalling Arabi to Egypt: 'he only needed an excuse of some public kind to do so'. It was thought that Blunt 'might usefully suggest' to his Egyptian friends that, if they returned Arabi as a member of the General Assembly for which elections were about to be held, 'it would serve as a reason for urging his recall from exile'.

Since Hamilton seemed to approve the plan Blunt took it that Knowles's message had been given on Gladstone's authority. He had no reason, of course, to trust Gladstone and, as he wrote to Mrs. Howard, he suspected that the Foreign Office wished to stir up just enough trouble in regard to the elections to make them appear spontaneous. Having used him to this end the Government probably would repudiate him. But even at the risk of incurring odium he felt that he should take whatever chance offered to obtain Arabi's return. And the chance seemed brighter than heretofore: Malet and Colvin were to be replaced, he also learned from Knowles, by

Major Baring who had a reputation for large-mindedness and was believed to be in full accord with liberal principles.

His first impression of Baring was favourable: 'he imposes on one a good deal as a man of sense and integrity, and without being exactly brilliant, seems capable of original ideas'. But he was not open-minded on the subject of recalling the exiles: 'this was quite out of the question'. And when Blunt, not mentioning Knowles's revelations, said he understood something in the order of a restoration was desired in Downing Street, Baring did not take up the point. He replied merely that he intended to support the Khedive and the Circassians to the limit of his power. 'It was useless talking further. Whatever Gladstone may dream of, or pretend to dream,' said Blunt, 'it is clear the Foreign Office has not changed its mind.'<sup>1</sup>

The joyous welcome given him by the Nationalists somewhat soothed his spirits ruffled by Baring's rebuff to his political schemes. An Arabic paper published a laudatory greeting and the *Phare d'Alexandrie* a long article describing the Nationalists' pleasure at his return and the corresponding displeasure of the Khedive. One old Egyptian, Salim Basalim, said to Blunt: 'there are many in this town who, if they knew you had passed down the street, would kiss the dust of your footsteps.' Having uttered this flattery he looked about in a frightened way and said he must go. 'They are all in terror of their lives,' wrote Blunt. Only one young Nationalist soldier showed any courage, averring that the soldiers were ready to kill their English officers, a suggestion that Blunt quashed without hesitation.

His actions during the few days at Cairo could not be interpreted as indiscreet except in one case. In answer to a message from an Egyptian imprisoned unjustly in the Zaptieh gaol, Blunt wrote asking Baring's permission to visit the prison. No answer came. So Blunt effected an entrance unassisted, and saw the Egyptian and four others who asked him to look after their interests. The following day brought Baring's answer—a refusal. At once Blunt wrote to tell the Resident of his visit and to recommend the prisoners to his protection. Three days

later Baring sent a dispatch to Granville enclosing a circular issued to the mudirs that he hoped would clear the gaols of all persons improperly detained. He followed it with another containing a copy of a decree granting amnesty to all offenders accused of crimes connected with the rebellion, except murder or rape. The result was that the five prisoners whom Blunt had visited were released. 'I learned the news a few weeks later in Ceylon,' wrote Blunt years afterwards, 'and that it was due to my intervention, though I cannot remember that any of the prisoners wrote personally to thank me. My action on their behalf was, I believe, a chief reason for my exclusion from Egypt during the following three years, for Baring resented my interference with what ought to have been his sole business.'

The ship *Ghoorkha* in which the Blunts sailed for Ceylon proved 'a detestable conveyance, overcrowded, swarming with vermin, and miserably provided'. They had hardly got aboard when Blunt developed a low fever that rapidly grew into a serious illness. There was no doctor and no means of caring for a sick person. He was driven out of his cabin by its discomforts and laid on a table in the saloon, where he passed days of misery in the heat, cared for by his wife and her maid Cowie, a devoted and admirable nurse. With their fellow passengers, a rough set of Colonial English planters from India, Assam and Burmah, they had a constant battle for existence.

At Colombo, Arabi and Mahmud Sami, a civilian Nationalist leader who had also suffered exile, came abroad to escort the Blunts to the country house that Sami had prepared for them. A deputation of Mohammedans welcomed them ashore. Flowers decorated the way to their house, some miles from the landing-place; a triumphal arch spanned the entrance; fireworks and illuminations were set off in their honour. But Blunt was too ill to be conscious of the festivities.

Gradually he recovered and learned from the exiles much that he afterwards related in the first volume of the 'Secret History Series'. He also obtained from them a clear statement of the policy they would recommend the Government of Egypt

to follow and sent it with a letter to *The Times* where it was published on December 13th.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, during their ten months in Ceylon the old quarrel between Circassian and Arab had broken out. The exiles were divided into two parties headed respectively by Mahmud Sami, a Circassian though a Nationalist, and Arabi, the fellah. Though he respected Sami and was obliged to rebuke Arabi strongly in various matters of domestic dispute, Blunt still felt Arabi to be a 'whale among minnows'. 'In spite of faults and failings, there is something great about him which compels one's respect. His faults are all the faults of his race, his virtues are his own.' 'I have been more than ever impressed during my present visit,' wrote Blunt in his letter to *The Times*, 'with the reality of Arabi's claim to be considered a patriot and a man of genius. By a man of genius I understand one who is capable of large and new ideas, who has the passion to impress these strongly upon others, and who above all possesses the courage and persistence to work them to their end. These qualities Arabi certainly has, and I know of no other Egyptian of whom anything corresponding can be said.'

In spite of the exiles' disturbing jealousy and bickering, Blunt doubted if he had ever been happier than at Colombo. 'I have had,' he wrote, 'such satisfaction as seldom comes on earth, that of seeing the bread one has cast on the waters return to one a hundredfold, a feeling that at last the power to do good has been won, and more than one's wishes granted.'

Periods of recovery from severe illness he was apt to remember with especial pleasure, the convalescence at Colombo no less than others. The long days of semi-invalidism were full of contentment. He lay in his chair between the columns of the veranda, watching the birds and the squirrels and the bright butterflies in the sunlight; he could see the fishing-boats drawn up on the sand by the river's mouth and men bathing their oxen and horses; or he looked over the garden, past the banyan-tree, to the banana grove and the coco-nut palms. He was touched by the solicitude of the Mohammedans of Ceylon and of the exiles, especially Arabi who took from his arm where he

habitually wore it and placed upon Blunt's a little leather bag containing a charm to cure him. The Mohammedans gave him a dinner and before he left they came in a body to see him and he preached them 'a sort of sermon'. Later reflecting as he was apt to do on what might have been, he thought that had he felt himself really at the point of death in Ceylon he would have made profession of Islam, and perhaps attained to lasting honour in Mohammedan regard, so great was the devotion of all the community towards him.

Although he had convinced himself intellectually that as a result of man's obstinately exaggerated notion of his own importance in the universe, all religions were equally in error, he was not reconciled to his own loss of belief. His sympathy continued to be with the cause of religion. He had been tempted in 1881 to adopt the beliefs of the Egyptians with whose struggle for a political and religious reformation he was so closely connected and 'more than once in the succeeding years', he said, 'I have been very near to making the required profession, but somehow the incredulity of my reason has always at the last moment proved too strong, and I have been unable to pronounce publicly words to which my intellect could not wholly subscribe. It was in one of these moods of religious attraction that I embarked upon my new project of the Indian journey'.

It is not surprising, therefore, that his interest in India lay in a great measure in the position of Indian Moslems as a living force in Islam. He had not ceased to believe in the possibility of a liberal Mohammedan reformation. If for the moment it had been scotched in Egypt, it might still spring up in India and spread from there.

Nor is it astonishing that with this interest was combined a desire to study the political condition of all Indian natives under foreign rule. The relations of the Governor of Ceylon, Sir Arthur Gordon, with the native community of the island were a revelation to Blunt of what friendly terms could exist between foreign governor and native governed. But he



shrewdly suspected that he would find few such relationships in India. To discover whether or not the British administration was ruining India, and vitiating the power of its Mohammedan inhabitants as he thought likely, was the twofold object of his journey.

## 2

News of the Blunts' arrival had been heralded by the Mohammedans of Ceylon. When they landed in India, at Tuticorn, on November 12th, most of the Moslem population appeared to escort them to their hotel and, during their two hours' stay, to set before them the grievances and needs of the Mohammedans of Southern India. This was what Blunt wanted.

Jemal-ed-Din, whose talk during a London visit in the spring of 1883 had suggested this Indian journey, had warned him that it would be difficult to get in touch with native opinion. On the contrary, partly because of letters of introduction, including several from the Colombo natives and Egyptian exiles and Jemal-ed-Din himself, he found the natives anxious to discuss the situation and, usually, trustful of his friendship. He learned, to be sure, that the Viceroy, Lord Ripon, had been warned not to allow him to land since his purpose, it was alleged, was to stir up sedition. In England he was 'credited with having gone to India with the intention of overthrowing English supremacy and establishing Mohammedan rule and rapine through the Peninsula'. 'So,' Lady Gregory wrote to him, 'I think you still have a chance of Tower Hill!' And an Anglo-Indian journal,<sup>3</sup> the *Pioneer*, with which Sir Auckland Colvin, who had returned to the Indian Civil Service, was connected, denounced him, saying that, as he had egged on revolution in Egypt, so he would encourage it in India.

The Viceroy, however, seemed to ignore the warning; and

the adverse criticism of the *Pioneer* acted as a recommendation to discontented natives. To Moslems, particularly, it was a happy introduction, recalling, as it did, Blunt's past efforts on behalf of Islam. Knowledge of his part in the Egyptian events of the last few years, though not always accurate, was widespread in India; he was known as the writer of *The Future of Islam* which had created considerable interest among Indian Mohammedans and was, in 1884, being translated into Urdu to gain it still wider influence; and the publication of his Colombo and Indian speeches in *The Times* and in *Abu Nadara*—a journal edited in Paris by Blunt's friend, James Sanua, an exiled sympathizer with Egyptian Nationalists—and in Indian journals, helped to spread his fame.

Still more useful to him was his quick understanding of native grievances. His sympathy with Islam gave him an insight into the Moslem point of view and his knowledge of the Egyptian fellah illuminated his dealings with the Indian ryot. Egypt had taught him how to extract information and to weigh its significance. Experience of the intrigues of Egyptian politics helped him—especially at Hyderabad—to unravel the tangle of Indian politics. He had learned to trust completely neither natives nor officials. It might be said, of course, that he could not learn the truth in India because he did not understand the various vernaculars; and he might be suspected of wanting to be told the worst. In reality he did his best to guard against false information by taking a local interpreter in each place who could not have been warned by the interpreter of the preceding place what answer to give.

To the natives the sincerity of Blunt's goodwill and the seriousness of his attempt to help them was soon made clear. When thirty-odd highly respectable Mohammedan gentlemen who had come to the Patna station to bid him farewell were insulted by an English army doctor, Blunt not only defended them on the spot, but carried the matter to headquarters and persevered until an apology to the Patna worthies was forthcoming. Finding the Government of Hyderabad at the mercy

of official and non-official intrigues, he laid the situation before Lord Ripon and managed by dint of constant pressure to have it straightened out. Recognizing their want of education he not only urged Mohammedans to make every effort to obtain it but himself set on foot a scheme for a Mohammedan university to be founded at Hyderabad, drew up a plan, started a subscription, and in every quarter forwarded publicity in its favour.

These virtuous activities were hardly welcomed by British officials. In their attitude toward him may be discerned something of the uneasy but long-suffering forbearance of much tried elderly relations or old friends. For him the perturbation created by his Indian journey was not the least of its pleasures. There is no doubt that seriously as he took his work for the Indians, he also enjoyed the power that he wielded for its own sake. Without much faith in the courage or persistence in active reform of the natives left to themselves, it was a satisfaction to him to have them take counsel with him and to feel himself necessary to the completion of their plans.

The Blunts' journey was a sort of royal progress. The first day at Tuticorin proved an augury to be trusted. Everywhere they stopped, sometimes at towns where they merely halted in the train, they were greeted by a body of notables anxious to read them an address of welcome. Departing, they left on the station platform, frequently, a group of Mohammedan gentlemen endeavouring manfully to shout a hip-hip-hooray of farewell. Everywhere they listened to speeches in their honour and in return delivered exhortations. Everywhere they were fêted and dined. Gifts were sometimes sent them, but these they returned, except small ones that bound them to no obligation. In accepting thirty 'cups of sweetness'—thirty dishes of whipped cream—Lady Anne enchanted the sender by writing in Arabic 'the sweetness of your gifts delights us, but we are grieved at the absence of the giver'. The court poet of Hyderabad, self-styled 'the Bulbul of the Deccan', wrote complimentary verses to them. There was much diffi-

culty in explaining to the Mohammedans of Madura that the Blunts were not relations of Her Majesty the Queen.

They saw not only the well-known sights that all tourists see in India, but they had intimate glimpses of various strata of Indian life and their unremitting energy enabled them to get a very fair view of a cross-section upon which to base their judgments. At Lucknow they looked out over the ruins left by the Indian Mutiny with their host, the Rajah Emir Husseyn, the only survivor in his family of British retribution after the Mutiny; at Benares, where they were guests of the Maharajah, they visited the last of the Moguls, a 'sad old relic perched in a half-ruinous house, like a sick eagle, looking down on the river and the crescent-shaped city, with his little group of tattered servants'. At Hyderabad they stayed with the British Resident, the Mulvi Sami Ullah was their host at Aligarh, the English railway superintendent at Bellari. One evening they dined with the richest and most important Mohammedans of Calcutta, the next, with Mohammed Saïd and a party of poor students. Indian reformers of note such as Malabari the Parsee, at Bombay, and Seyd Ahmed, the founder of Aligargh College, and the Brahmin Ragunath Rao at Madras; and many individuals of no public importance who had part in the Government, or in professions or trade, in the towns; and, in the villages, peasants and land-owners, discussed the situation with them. They took part in functions at native courts and in British Government functions. The first meetings of the National Conference at Calcutta during the last days of December, 1883, were perhaps the most important gatherings at which Blunt was present, because of the effect of their repetition in after years on the development of the Indian situation.<sup>4</sup>

As three parts of the one thousand delegates to the Conference were from Bengal its first meetings were somewhat provincial. But they seemed to Blunt creditable since two of the speakers, Bannerji and Bose, were brilliant, the others sensible and moderate. He himself refused to speak at the first meeting, although he sympathized with the attack made in it

on the Covenanted Civil Service; at the second, he made a short address in which he said that he believed '*all* nations were fit for self-government', and, contrasting India with Greece when it was first set to manage its own affairs, 'few more so than the Indian'. The National fund was discussed at the last meeting and a considerable sum, to which Blunt contributed one hundred rupees, subscribed to it. In a short speech he advised the conference as to practical measures to be taken; and after another Englishman, Seymour Keay,<sup>5</sup> an Anglo-Indian sympathetic with native grievances, who came in late, had delivered an address on rural distress, he spoke again giving his 'ideas on what might be looked forward to—first, elections to the legislative council, secondly, representation in the English Parliament, and thirdly, home Parliaments of their own in the different provinces on the Colonial System'. A vote of thanks was given to the two Englishmen present—'and so ended the first session of the Indian Parliament. May it be memorable in history'.

In four months' time the whole of India could hardly be studied exhaustively. The travellers worked their way northward through Southern Madras and the famine districts of the Presidency to the native Mohammedan state of Hyderabad, where Blunt embroiled himself in the Government intrigues and, he thought, got to the bottom of, and ultimately checkmated, the machinations of the Calcutta Foreign Office; thence to Bombay, eastward to Calcutta, and back from there to the United Provinces and Delhi. There was time merely for a flying trip through part of the Rajputana principalities. The Blunts returned to Hyderabad for the installation of the Nizam before going to Bombay again for the last fortnight before sailing. In these areas little escaped their observation: the mental attitude of the inhabitants and their physical well-being; the political and economic situation; the great studs of Arab horses;<sup>6</sup> the very trees and birds and butterflies, and the 'astounding tiger' in the zoo at Bombay.

In 1907 he wrote of the Indian tour as 'the most interesting

four months perhaps of my political life—I may say, also the most successful, for I had achieved all and more than all that I set out to accomplish. The knowledge I had sought of the condition of the natives under our rule, and especially of the Mohammedan community, had been acquired with a fulness I did not expect, and, what was certainly beyond all my hopes, I had gained an influence in native India such as few Englishmen have found themselves possessed of, even at the end of a lifetime spent in the country'. Undoubtedly the Indian travels had been well timed. They were made under circumstances of exceptional interest and at an exceptional moment, when later events were distinctly foreshadowed and solutions of problems later put into effect were suggested.

Hope of reform had been aroused in the native mind by Gladstone's reversal of his predecessor's policy of imperial expansion and by the arrival of the new Viceroy, Lord Ripon in 1880.<sup>7</sup> Three years later, when Blunt arrived, hope had given way to scepticism: Gladstone's Midlothian precepts had been belied by the Egyptian war of 1882 and the certainty had grown among Indian natives that the Government in England would no longer give Lord Ripon the support necessary to make headway in reform against the conservative opposition of the Anglo-Indian official world. But the moment of belief in the possibility of reform had done its work. It had aroused educated natives to serious thought on the best ways of righting their wrongs. Educated native India had come alive and was agitating; it welcomed the presence of one who encouraged it.

The ideas that Blunt propounded while in India were not at all revolutionary. That is evident on reading his public speeches and also from the fact that he was given the countenance of the Imperial authorities. His actions were seditious only to the degree that any encouragement given to native politics is so. He encouraged peaceful agitation for just demands because the demands already existed but needed support to be seriously considered; if they failed to command attention, strife would result. Blunt still could not believe that

the British Government, once it heard the demands, would fail to recognize their justice and act upon them if only for expediency's sake.

Later, seeing his work undone—even the one great practical measure, the foundation of a Mohammedan university at Hyderabad, fell through—he wondered at himself for not returning and protecting his schemes. 'I often look back,' he wrote in 1907, 'at the great position I then held with Hindus, Mohammedans, and Parsees, with a feeling of wonder and also of regret that in the sequel I should have put it to so little purpose. If I had had the perseverance to pursue the course I had begun, and had followed it out unflinchingly to its full results, I believe that I might have brought about a great permanent good for the people whose interests I had espoused, and perhaps with the Mohammedans encouraged them to a real reformation, social and intellectual, if not political'. But he had neither enough self-discipline to give up his whole life to work towards a single end nor enough 'faith in things unseen' to devote himself to a cause that was more than half religious.

## 3

Short of going back to India, he did what he could on his return to England for its natives. He published his conclusions as to the state of the country in four articles in the *Fortnightly Review* that came out during the height of the Anglo-Indian agitation against Lord Ripon. The Anglo-Indian Press seized upon them with acrimony. Lady Gregory, herself full of enthusiasm for the *Fortnightly* articles, reported that an Anglo-Indian of Madras had remarked to her, 'I *hate* Mr. Blunt', and another non-Indian sympathizer said, 'I am glad the Blunts are happy. People that create a great deal of mischief generally are. May the Lord give them what they deserve'—to which Lady Gregory quickly replied, 'Amen'.

But there were cooler Anglo-Indian critics, such as Blunt's friend Sir Alfred Lyall, at that time Governor of the North-West Provinces, who while regretting that 'the force and benefit' of Blunt's articles should have been diminished 'by incautious use of unverified information' and by a too evidently partial attitude, admitted that there was truth in much that Blunt wrote. The native press of course was whole-hearted in approval. 'In the defence, as in the attack,' Blunt recognized 'the highest tribute which could be paid to their merit as an accurate representation of native griefs and native aspirations.' As such, and because the Indian question seemed to him the most important that Englishmen of that generation would have to solve, he collected and published them in 1885 in a volume under the title, *Ideas About India*.

In the four preliminary chapters he discussed the difficulties in which the British Government in India had involved itself under the headings of agricultural danger, race hatred, awakened effort on the part of the Mohammedan population towards its own advancement, and—taking as example the native state of Hyderabad, with the government of which he was now intimately acquainted—the aggressive policy of the Calcutta Foreign Office towards native states. The final chapter is entitled 'The Future of Self-Government'. In it he summarized the advantages and disadvantages to India—and so to England—of its system of Government of 1884–85 and stated fully the immediate reforms demanded by the natives. He himself would like to see 'each province of India entirely self-managed as regards all civil matters, raising its own revenue in its own way, providing for its own needs of internal order, public works, and administration of all kinds, and controlled by the constant supervision of its own provincial assembly'. But, 'as long as India remains under the protection of England, certain charges on the revenue and certain executive and legislative functions would have to remain Imperial'.

Nowhere in the book did Blunt advocate a break between India and England: 'The supreme Imperial Government,' he



wrote, 'all wish to preserve. . . . An Imperial Government and an Imperial Army will remain a necessity for India.' Nor did he belittle the good that England had done in India. He had found much of which to be proud as an Englishman. What had seemed to him most hopeful in India were its intellectual and religious aspects under English rule, and 'I am glad', he wrote, 'to think that they could hardly have been witnessed under any other domination than our own'. The purpose of his book was the salutary one of fostering needed reforms in time to preserve that domination in peace and amity.

England has now granted most of the Indian reforms which Blunt advocated, but they have been wrung from her after many years of strife and have bred all the bitterness which he wished to avoid. His voice was prophetic when he warned England that the Indian native 'might without actual revolt make all government impossible. We have had', he said, 'a foretaste of what passive obstruction can do in Egypt, and the art may well spread to India'. He has been justified also in his prediction that if England did not support the Mohammedans in their desire for advancement, particularly in education, the Hindu population with their greater enterprise would swamp the Moslems, creating a new and virulent problem.

Until 1907, Blunt did not publish the whole history of his Indian travels, and then only privately in the second part of his 'Secret History Series', a volume in which he included also an account of his activities throughout 1884 to November, 1885. Like the first volume of the series, it is written chiefly in diary form, and possesses the freshness of all good diaries and the spice of good gossip. It abounds, as do all his journals, in clever thumbnail sketches and amusing sidelights; more often than his other narratives it has pages of delightful description of the country and the palaces and temples which, being 'still the home of a living worship', interested him as those of Egypt and Greece did not.

Blunt's ethics in using confidential information are sometimes impugned. He is charged, particularly in connection

with his writings about India, with using information that had come to him in private conversation—with Lord Lytton during his first visit to India in 1880, or with other friends at other times. He could not resist supporting his opinions by whatever came to hand. He argued perhaps justly, that, since officials took care to publish everything that would back up their point of view, it was only fair that information on the other side should be made public, and much of this information was carefully guarded except in private conversation.

The unnecessary gossip and harsh, trivial judgments that are included in his privately printed diaries need not be defended since they were expunged from the public version. They bear witness to the less amiable side of his character: his interest in petty and even malicious gossip; his quick, often ill-considered judgments—his voracious appetite, in short, for mental as well as physical stimulus. The later expurgated book, published in 1909 and entitled *India Under Ripon*, is made up of the first half of the private volume which deals with India and of *Ideas about India*, except for the chapter on 'Native States', the matter of which is contained in the diary itself. Together they form a comprehensive account of the Indian journey: the diary is invaluable in giving the political conclusions a background that makes them vivid and convincing, and the essays add point to the personal experience.

## 4

When he arrived in England after the Indian journey, Blunt unexpectedly found himself high in favour. The political world, fairly generally, now admitted that he had been right about Egypt in 1882 and that the British Government would have done far better to avoid war and to work with, rather than against, Arabi. And yet many of the very men who professed regret for the war seemed intent upon bringing on a new one

by forcing England to intervene in the Egyptian—Soudan imbroglio. Blunt's discouragement was profound.

He had suspected that a recrudescence of the same old policy would occur when, in January, while still in India, he had heard of General Gordon's mission to Khartoum.<sup>8</sup> Blunt himself both liked and admired Gordon with whom he had had some sympathetic talk and correspondence about both India and Egypt; but the Government, he thought, looked upon Gordon as mad, and, except for unavowed—and unavowable—motives would be unlikely to choose him as its emissary.<sup>9</sup> Blunt had little faith in Governmental ulterior motives. The mission seemed to him to be, probably, a new imperialistic move toward aggrandizement.

Concerning the Mahdi he had much information from the Mohammedan point of view that was lacking in England and a more just idea of his power than existed there. On his way to India he had found sympathy with the Mahdists fairly widespread and had wondered at Sir Evelyn Baring's apparent unawareness of the threatening aspect of the Soudanese horizon. In India he found that the leading Mohammedans were watching the Mahdi's movements with keen interest. Persians and Arabs from Yemen told him that should the Mahdi succeed in winning his way across the Red Sea, all Mohammedans would rise to his support, preferring him to the English. Blunt, therefore, realized that wide complications were bound to follow opposition to the Mahdi's movement, and that however peaceful Gordon's intentions might be. In any case he would inevitably be pushed into hostility if only because he believed—as Blunt knew he did—that the retention of Khartoum was necessary to Egypt. Alarmed, he sent a letter of warning to the General:

Delhi, January 24th, 1884.

My dear General,

I feel obliged to write to you about your mission to the Soudan. I see it announced to-day by telegraph, without

explanation of its object, but I cannot wait till more definite news arrives, and I desire to warn you. It may be you are going there to make peace between the Mahdi and our troops in Egypt, to acknowledge his sovereignty in the Soudan, and arrange terms for the evacuation of Khartoum. If so, I can only wish you Godspeed. It is a good work, and you will accomplish it. But if, as I fear it may be, from the tradition of those in power, the object of your mission is to divide the tribes with a view to retaining any part of the country for the Khedive, to raise men for him and scatter money, it is bad work, and you will fail. It must be so. Neither your courage nor your honest purpose, nor the inspiration which has hitherto guided you, will bring you success. I know enough to be able to assure you that every honest Mohammedan in Egypt and North Africa and Arabia sympathizes with the Mahdi's cause, not necessarily believing him to have a divine mission, but as representing ideas of liberty and justice, and religious government, which they acknowledge to be divine. For this reason you will only have the men of Belial on your side, and these will betray you.

I beg you to be cautious. Do not trust to the old sympathy which united Englishmen with the Arabs. I fear it is a thing of the past, and that even your great name will not protect you with them. Also consider what your death will mean; the certainty of a cry for vengeance in England and an excuse with those who ask no better than a war of conquest. I wish I could be sure that all those who are sending you on your mission do not foresee this end.

Forgive me if I am wrong in my fears; and believe me yours, very gratefully in memory of last year.

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT.

Whether Gordon ever received this letter is not known. In any case before he reached Egypt he had abandoned his first idea of going to the Mahdi to negotiate some sort of truce

during the peaceful departure of the Egyptian garrisons. He had determined to rely upon his own prestige among the tribes and the announcement of England's peaceful intentions to win support sufficient to withstand the Mahdi. Such a policy was based, evidently, upon a failure to recognize Mohammed Ahmed's strength or the significance of his movement and was destined, as Blunt foresaw, to failure unless strongly backed by military force.

The history of the mission, its purpose, Gordon's orders and intentions only very recently have been set forth accurately.<sup>10</sup> During the years 1884-85 they were misunderstood even by those who had first-hand information. News reached England from Khartoum in such higgledy-piggledy fashion that almost no one could form a true idea of what was really going on in the Soudan. In common with most liberal-minded men, Blunt began to feel with the Government that Gordon was mad. This feeling became a conviction as the year progressed. Harsh as it was, it seemed the most charitable interpretation possible. Blunt did not learn how mistaken it was until many years had passed.

His later change of attitude toward Gordon, and the reasons for it, he recorded with the diary of events of 1884-85 that he published twenty-seven years later in *Gordon at Khartoum*. But, for the sake of presenting a true picture, he retained there the passages from the diary that gave his old opinion. However interesting the records of early mistaken judgments and ill-founded prophecies make the book as a human document—rage sometimes lends a book life—they provide critics with admirable examples of Blunt's 'folly' and 'exaggerated words'. None the less his opinions were based on just deductions from the information at hand, and their presence in the book, if foolhardy, is the result of deliberate honesty.

Blunt's suspicions of the justice of his earlier attitude had been aroused by what seemed to him the extravagant attack on Gordon made by Lord Cromer in *Modern Egypt* in 1907,

and, on re-examining all the available evidence, he had discovered that 'the prime responsibility of the mission as necessarily one of war was . . . that of those who sent' General Gordon, and the final failure of the mission was owing to Lord Cromer himself. Given Gordon's character—that of a 'Christian knight errant, seeking service where there were dragons of iniquity to fight, or distressed persons to be rescued by feats of arms'—plus the obvious inherent difficulties of the situation, it seemed to Blunt to have been either criminal stupidity or craft on the part of the Government to assume that the mission could be successful.

His mistrust of Lord Cromer, on whom, he thought, the responsibility for the Government's action largely rested, led him into such violence of language and tone as to cast a suspicion on the justice of his indictment. Even though Blunt saw something of 'the great proconsul' in the 'nineties and was at least on amicable terms with him then, he never felt confidence in him. Inevitably, he detested Cromer's political methods, and his certainty that his exclusion from Egypt in 1884-85 was owing to Cromer's resentment of his interference the year before with political prisoners at Cairo added a personal prejudice against him that was increased by Cromer's references to him in *Modern Egypt. Gordon at Khartoum* is a blast directed against Lord Cromer. But it both amply vindicates Gordon and disposes in large part of the political charges and aspersions cast upon Blunt in *Modern Egypt*.<sup>11</sup>

In 1884-85, however, Blunt was interested neither in opposing Lord Cromer nor in justifying Gordon. He was absorbed in combating his own exclusion from Egypt<sup>12</sup> and in working out an independent scheme to offset the harm that was being done by Gordon's mission. As early as April he put forward a counter-proposal of means to bring peace to the Soudan and Egypt: negotiation through an accredited Government agent with the Mahdi himself.<sup>13</sup> At first Blunt urged that Gordon be ordered to proceed with such direct negotiation; then, seeing that hopeless, he offered to undertake

it himself. Sheykh Jemal-ed-Din on being questioned by Blunt said that he, also, considered the dispatch of such a commissioner not only right but feasible. In communication himself with agents of the Mahdi, he offered to arrange for the safe conduct to Mohammed Ahmed of Blunt or of any accredited agent of the English Government of whom Blunt approved. The Sheykh agreed with Blunt's views in regard to Egypt and the Soudan: the Soudan should be left to its native tribes as it was of no use to Egypt, and the chief reason for its retention, the problem of the Nile water, could be solved by peaceful negotiation.

## 5

Very soon after opening his campaign for peace in his usual way by a letter to Gladstone suggesting the dispatch of an accredited agent to the Mahdi, Blunt saw that the Government again would use him only as far as it could do so without acknowledgment or recognition. 'What they want, evidently,' he wrote, 'is that I should take all the responsibility of the negotiations on myself, and offer terms which they might afterwards repudiate. But they won't catch me again doing this, and, if I go to Obeyd, I go as a British envoy. Otherwise I should only be delayed by the Khedive on my road.'

A leading article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* advocating his ideas, Button's cheering assertion that his arguments were making a mark, the Prime Minister's apparent personal inclination toward peaceful methods, all encouraged him to believe that the Government might be convinced. Unfortunately the majority of Members of Parliament were determined upon sending troops to 'rescue' Gordon, and, in Gordon's words echoed by the editor Stead, to 'smash the Mahdi'. By judicious political play they forced the Prime Minister's hand. Blunt received a categorical reply to his

proposal: 'Her Majesty's Government could not make use of my offer to act as mediator in the Soudan, inasmuch as it must already be known throughout that region that they, in common with the Government of Egypt, have no other desire than to promote the evacuation of the country—and the restoration of its liberties.'

More letters flowed from Blunt's pen. Letters from Frederic Harrison and even John Morley supported him. Blunt sent for Sheykh Mohammed Abdu to come to London, thinking that his personal integrity and the facts at his command might convince members of the Government. But, on the Sheykh's arrival no interview could be arranged with Gladstone and although he got on well with Lord Hartington and Lord Randolph Churchill, others who were unused to talking with Orientals and somewhat abrupt in manner gave him a sense of insincerity or hostility. His visit had little political effect and gave little pleasure to Blunt as he was still very bitter against the English because of the Egyptian war. One or two incidents, however, Blunt relates with the sense of irony which never failed him. 'From the terrace [of the Houses of Parliament] we showed Abdu,' he recorded, 'the police boat cruising around to prevent dynamite attempts, a sight which edified him, and we pointed out to him Mr. Bright talking on a bench to Nathaniel Rothschild.'<sup>14</sup>

Determined to pull every wire possible, Blunt went with Lady Anne, by way of Paris and a visit to the Potockis in Poland, to Constantinople to try to persuade the Sultan to throw his influence toward a new settlement in Egypt, and the substitution for Tewfik of a Khedive who could rule Egypt in friendly relation with the Mahdi. From the standpoint of definite political results his visit was as signal a failure as Mohammed Abdu's to London.

The Sultan, shut up in Yildiz Kiosk and suspicious of any new agent arriving on the scene, refused to give him an interview, according him only a state visit to the Seraglio and the Arab stud. But Blunt was never at a loss for ways



in which to fill his time. He reviewed the changes that had come about in the city since his young diplomatic days there, bemoaning the replacement of the shabby charming old Turkish houses by new Europeanized villas; and he rode to the at maïdan where the Jews were keeping Sabbath in their best clothes and some of them were catching goldfinches in a net and he had the satisfaction of setting a bird free. He talked politics over with every sort of person: with Turkish Pashas, particularly old Achmet Vefyk Pasha, whose keen intelligence and outspoken talk with its bursts of wit, made him the most remarkable Turk and one of the most remarkable men Blunt had ever met; with Prince Halim, the possible future Khedive of Egypt, and with various refugees from that country who greeted him as the Saviour of their lives; with the Patriarch of Catholic Armenia; with Kurdish patriots—there is no end to the list. The information gleaned from this journey Blunt was to find useful years later when he came to write the first of his 'Secret History series', but it showed him that little was to be hoped from the Sultan in the present Soudan Crisis.

On his return from Constantinople, as Button had been putting it about during his absence that he was in constant communication with the Mahdi, Blunt found that his words carried greater weight than hitherto. He was in considerable demand as a source of information, suffering the usual misrepresentation.<sup>15</sup> In his diary for December 23rd he noted: 'In the morning Stead [editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*] sent me a proof of his interview to correct, a ridiculous thing which I had to rewrite.' To this he afterwards added, 'The proof was brought by an office boy, with a message that it was to go to press in an hour, and it was a mere accident that I was at home and able to stop it. It contained, among other extravagances put into my mouth, that Egypt would be better annexed than continue ill-governed as it was, an idea which, if Stead's, was certainly not mine. When I saw Stead later in the day and expostulated with him about this, his answer was

characteristic: "Well," he said, "if you did not say it, it is just what you ought to have said."

News of General Wolseley's advance towards Khartoum, of the battle of Abu Klea, and finally of General Steward's progress towards Metemneh, made it clear that no moves towards negotiation were likely to impress the Government. Blunt's wrath knew no bounds. 'Great God! What a stupid dull beast this world is. It sends an army to fight against an innocent people, and an innocent people destroy that army. One would think that not a single M.P. from Mr. Gladstone downwards had ever read a word of the history of Greece or heard of Marathon. This stupidity is more hideous even than their cruelty and lying. But if there is a God upon the earth, He will this time do justice.' All that he could do was to work feverishly upon the Turkish Ambassador, a well-meaning but muddled old gentleman, and upon Hobart Pasha, the Sultan's private envoy in London, to dissuade the Sultan from sending help to Wolseley in the Sudan.

The shock of the fall of Khartoum<sup>16</sup> and of Gordon's death turned many, who had hitherto supported the sending of troops into the Soudan, towards a more peaceful policy: possibility of negotiations revived; applications came to Blunt from numerous high quarters, usually indirectly, to inquire about means of communication with the Mahdi; many official suggestions were subjected to Blunt's veto or approval; numerous letters were written by him to *The Times* and huge meetings at which he spoke were held not only in London but in Birmingham and elsewhere. Bowles published a first-rate caricature of him entitled 'A Prophet' by Ape in *Vanity Fair*, along with a laudatory leading article by Jehu Junior. But the Government refused to work through him openly or to accept his suggestions; nothing conclusive could be accomplished.

At the end of the first week in May, news came of a fresh victory of General Graham at Suakin, a victory that consisted, it was reported, in surrounding a Bedouin camp in which

there were women and children and cattle as well as fighting men and in firing the lot.<sup>17</sup> Blunt, stirred to white fury, rushed to the House of Commons where he persuaded members of all parties to protest. The upshot was that at question time, Morley asked for an explanation and Hartington promised a definite statement of military policy. On May 10th, Hartington made his statement: Great Britain was to clear out of the Soudan bag and baggage at the first rising of the Nile; everything, including the proposed Berber railway and excepting only Suakin, was to be abandoned until such a time as the Government could make other arrangements with a 'civilized power'.

Every one had been prepared for Governmental surrender; but no one had dreamed that the surrender would be so complete. Rejoicing and softened by success, Blunt sent Gladstone congratulations on the abandonment of war and a copy of the new edition of his *Proteus* sonnets. The Prime Minister's reply was equally amiable: he 'would turn with pleasure from the Soudan to *Proteus*'. With the complacency of victory, Blunt remarked, 'these little interchanges of courtesy in war time are agreeable, and the old man appreciates them, looking on all politics as he does in the light of a debating club.'

A month later Blunt's spirits soared higher: the Government was defeated, astonishingly enough on the budget. There was hope of Tory readjustment. Unhappily it soon became apparent that Lord Salisbury, the new Tory Prime Minister, would listen only to Wolseley and Baring. The fight was on again. Again Blunt was drawn into the fray. Lord Randolph Churchill urged him to talk to Sir Henry Drummond Wolff who was being sent by the Government to inquire into the situation at Constantinople and Cairo and prepare a policy. Lord Randolph said, 'You need not mind putting yourself forward in this matter; you are an authority on Egypt and have a right to be heard'. Through Blunt he sounded out the possibility of Arabi's return to Egypt as

minister under Tewfik, and persuaded Blunt to arrange for Sheykh Jemal-ed-Din to come to London to confer with him.

The Sheykh, who had been living, exiled, in Paris where Blunt had seen something of him during the last three years, spent three months, 'the full term of Arab hospitality', at Blunt's house in James Street. The visit began propitiously but resulted chiefly in much expense and distress for Blunt. It ended with Jemal-el-Din's departure in dudgeon. Blunt had been obliged to ask two of the Sheykh's Oriental friends, who had created a great disturbance 'by beating each other over the heads with umbrellas in a quarrel about religion or politics', to leave the house—'one must draw the line somewhere', he remarked.

Both Lord Randolph Churchill and Sir Henry Drummond Wolff were impressed favourably by the Sheykh's manner and arguments, and Wolff settled to communicate with Blunt through Churchill if, as he thought possible, he should find the Sheykh's help necessary to profitable negotiations. Blunt, then, at his own expense, was to send Jemal-ed-Din out to Constantinople. Wolff's final refusal, after several contradictory wires, to summon the Sheykh and rely on his advice was the prime reason, Blunt thought, for the failure of his mission.

There appeared to be nothing more that Blunt could do to further the cause of Egyptian liberty and, though what he had done seemed of little avail, he turned undaunted to a new field—Ireland—to which he was to devote himself for some years. And feeling the need of strengthening his influence he became engaged for the first time in election campaigns. Towards the end of the year came the Burmese war, more unnecessary bloodshed to goad him for the last time that year into passionate opposition and letters to *The Times*: 'This Burmese war,' he wrote, 'is a piece with all these wars: hungry commercial speculators making contracts with a dishonest prince, European intrigues, British remonstrances, official

interference, threatens from Calcutta, appeal of the Prince to his people, who strangely take his side in the quarrel, ultimatum issued, arrival of fleet, massacre of Europeans, bombardment, slaughter of natives, triumph of British arms, annexation of territory, pay, prize money, pensions, peerages all round, and so *da capo*.'

## HORSES AND ELECTIONEERING

## I

PREOCCUPIED as Blunt was with politics during 1884-85 he kept up with his friends and was on happy terms even with those who differed radically from him in political opinion—with Lytton, Auberon Herbert, and friends who attended the annual lawn tennis tournament at Crabbet, and many others. Towards people in general—

‘The human cattle grazing as they go,  
Unheedful of the heavens’—

he was tolerant as long as they did not importune him. Willing to listen to any point of view not born of stupidity, or to any gossip spiced with wit, first-rate talk on whatever subject delighted him. His attitude is touched off in the note recorded in his diary after a week-end spent at Brocket: ‘Of all the people in the world I like Henry Cowper best as companion. He represents Whig tradition in its most attractive form, that of a cultured politician of a hundred years ago—partly humane, partly sceptical, full of dignity, and profoundly immoral.’

Socially as well as politically Blunt held a trump card in the Crabbet Arab stud. Soon after it was founded it began to draw interested inspection and prospective buyers from all over the world and, for many years following 1880, it was popularized by a great midsummer sale at Crabbet of mares and horses which they planned to replace by importing others. As time went on the sales proved successful financially. And they became gay *fêtes champêtres* where everyone who was anyone was likely to be seen. Attendance had to be limited

by cards that were much sought after; a special train ran down from London to Three Bridges, the station for Crabbet; *The Times* devoted a full column—the rest of the Press perhaps more—to reporting the event.

That day of glory had not dawned in 1884 but the stud had already proved itself successful. There were from thirty to forty horses in the Crabbet stables at only £500 yearly loss, little more than Blunt's stable bill in former years. Not an animal had died nor had there been any serious illness among the imported horses; among those foaled in England there had been losses in their first year—the first year weathered, there was no more difficulty. Moreover, Blunt wrote, 'in pure Arabian breeding, while the stock is almost uniformly good, there are every year delightful surprises, which give an element of unbounded hope to the breeder. Every now and then a colt appears, recalling like a vision the shape and beauty of horses figured in old prints and books of the last century; the Godolphin, the Bloody-Shouldered, the Darley Arabian, stand before you; and beyond even these you seem to see an outline of the ideal horse which is the object of your dreams. On these you build a fabric of expectation; and as they improve each day, and grow beneath your eyes, you feel that you have at last that ideal in your grasp, whose chase alone brings happiness.'

Blunt upheld his sporting prestige—and enjoyed himself—by hunting frequently with the Leconfield and other hounds, and pinned his hope to winning the promised Newmarket Arab race. Mrs. Howard told him that 'Freddy Leveson had asked Rosebery the other day why he continued on the turf and he had answered because it was the easiest way in England to be accepted as a Statesman, and he had appealed to Gladstone, who quite agreed with him.' Blunt likewise agreed. 'If we win the Arab race at Newmarket,' he wrote, 'it will do more for my ideas than half a dozen victories for the Mahdi.'

No horse imported from Arabia, he realized, could hope to win against English thoroughbreds. But the young stock of



CRABET PARK





his own stud bred in conditions more favourable than those of the desert were taller, more lengthy, and deeper in girth than their sires and dams and had not fallen off in bone. This increase of size he believed would be accompanied to a great extent by increase of speed. He staked the fortunes of the stud on a beautiful three-year-old chestnut filly Halfa. She had been tried more than once against English thoroughbreds with results that made her winning against horses of her own Arab class seem a certainty. For second string to his bow and to make running for Halfa at the Newmarket race he entered Rataplan, winner of good races in India. As most promising competitor they had Dictator, a horse which they had persuaded an Arab dealer in Bombay to send over with others for the race.

The Blunts arrived at Newmarket on July 2nd, 1884, in fine fettle, sure of victory. 'All the world and his wife' crowded the course, and 'quite a mob' watched the Arabs stripped. The horses started on their canter and the Blunts saw them coming in a cluster at a tremendous pace on the hill, beyond the fir-trees. Complacently excited, they trotted back towards the paddock. Then to their utter dismay, they saw what seemed to be the Indian horses going on alone. Admiral Tryon's Asil won the race, Dictator second and Rataplan, who had been making the running for Halfa third. Halfa was not even in the running.

Blunt's disappointment was abysmal. He feared that the Jockey Club would not have the courage to repeat the race. When the winner, Asil, was 'handsomely beaten' a short time later by an inferior English thoroughbred, his fears were realized. The Press had thought the race childish. Blunt, moreover, was obliged to admit that the horses that had run best were precisely those showing least of the Arab type, and he was even thankful to have learned so early in the game that it would take more patience and money than he was prepared to give to breed Arabs for the turf. But he was chagrined by the political set-back which the defeat had administered.

That he understood fairly accurately the instability of his political position is evident from certain anecdotes that he recounted with gusto in his diary for 1885. He had a discussion with two friends, political opponents, about the advantage of truth-telling in politics. 'They would neither of them hear of it; but I said, "Look at me, if I had not made it a rule to speak the exact truth and have no secrets where should I be to-day? I have been engaged for the last four years in every kind of intrigue and yet my name stands clear."' They laughed at this.' He learned that Gladstone at this time thought him 'a charming person but on politics mad'. Somewhat earlier he had recorded in his diary: 'Goschen says I am an imprudent person who, if you tell anything to him, and he has a reason to be dissatisfied with you afterwards, repeats what you tell him.' Irritated by his whole-hearted defence of the Mahdi, one of his friends begged him 'not to talk in that way in England'. 'She said, "It is so stupid of you, because you have so much sense, and if you would be moderate, you might have great influence."' I said: "My influence will never be great in England because English people care nothing for principle and everything for party, and I am not a party man. My influence lies in the East, where all understand and accept me."'

He was conscious that his 'somewhat romantic view of politics', as he termed it, could not appeal *per se* to hard-headed politicians. Although his personal charm and energy as well as the justice of his arguments swung many to his way of thinking, and although the Government used him when they saw fit, he had upheld too many unpopular causes, and causes that had failed, for them to care to identify themselves publicly with him. Party men could not afford to commit themselves to unpopular policies unsanctioned by their party. Unofficial wire pulling, furthermore, and letters to *The Times*, and speeches to however worthy societies, become in time merely a joke. It seemed increasingly clear to Blunt that he must have some position of acknowledged public authority.

## 2

Early in 1885 he began to think vaguely of entering Parliament, but he could not decide with which party to throw in his lot. By birth he was a Conservative, and such he remained always in domestic politics. In foreign politics his beliefs accorded with those of no one party. Conservatives begged him to join Conservative ranks, Radicals besought him to become a Radical, others made various other suggestions. Despairing, he wrote, 'I am like a donkey between two bundles of hay—very like the donkey.'

By April he had concluded that his closest affinity probably lay with Lord Randolph Churchill's Fourth Party. "If you will come forward as my supporter," Lord Randolph said, "you can't do better, and I am asked almost every day to recommend candidates." I said, wrote Blunt, "'What will that bind me to? You know my foreign politics, but at home I am a Catholic and a Tory as regards the land question and education, and in Ireland I am a Nationalist.'" He made a face at the word "Nationalist". He said: "You could not come forward as an avowed 'Nationalist', but you need not say much about that. If you say that you have wide opinions on the Irish question it will be enough, and when you are once in Parliament you can take your own line." "But, what," I said, "is Tory Democracy? Tell me in two words, for I don't think I quite understand it." He said: "That is a question I am always in a fright lest someone should put it to me publicly. To tell the truth I don't know myself what Tory Democracy is. But I believe it is principally opportunism. But say you are a Tory Democrat, and that will do." I said: "You know me well enough to be sure that I would not be paid to be in Parliament if I was not free to take my own line. I had thought of standing as an Irish Home Ruler with Parnell, but I was in doubt and thought I would consult you." He said: "You would lose your influence if you did this.

Parnell would require you to join in his policy of obstruction and you would be discredited. You had better not commit yourself to that, though you might vote with him on purely Irish questions. But you should write out a programme of your ideas, and I will see if there is a constituency that will accept them." I said: "I will think it over and let you know." . . . I think perhaps after all,' Blunt added, 'I shall be freest with Randolph; and certainly his conversation to-day binds me to nothing.'<sup>1</sup>

Parnell urged him to get Lord Randolph to nominate him where there were Irish constituents, promising him the solid Irish vote. That settled it. He cast in his lot with the Tory Democrats. To make his position absolutely clear, he followed Lord Randolph's suggestion of drawing up a manifesto, entitled 'Am I a Tory Democrat?' in which he outlined his programme. Churchill approved it, boggling only at the term 'Home Rule', and authorized him to tell the Conservative agent, Middleton, that he would be of great value to the Conservative party. The manifesto, published as a letter in *The Times*, had considerable success: Skittles reported that the Prince of Wales wrote that he was 'really so pleased with it, and it is a real good letter'.

Middleton, with some difficulty, found a constituency willing to accept a Roman Catholic candidate advocating Irish Home Rule and interested chiefly in foreign politics.<sup>2</sup> On the morning of the electoral address, Blunt discovered that Churchill had failed to send his promised supporting letter and that two new Conservative candidates had been started. All the same Camberwell selected him as Conservative candidate.

His chief local supporters, he discovered, were men of no position, character or intelligence, the chairman of his committee being a sweating tailor. Camberwell was a new constituency created by the redistribution bill and politically chaotic. Organization had to be created and voters educated. There was, of course, little prejudice to be overcome; the

difficulty lay in persuading voters to take any interest whatever in politics. The most successful meeting held during the canvass for Blunt was one at which the speakers addressed their uncomprehending but enthusiastic audience in Arabic and Persian.

Blunt found electioneering 'a terrible come-down after politics of the golden East, or even of an Arab tribe'—speaking to 'one hundred frowsy fellows in a stuffy schoolroom talking nonsense about what they know or care nothing about', or mounted on a wagon in the street where nothing much short of pure socialism was listened to. To make an adequate impression, he said, it was necessary for a lord to address the meetings in the candidate's support. After explaining the intrigues that had brought on the Egyptian war to three thousand people on October 11th at Newcastle, where he had been asked to give the inaugural address at the Tyneside lectures, he was constrained to moan, 'What a difference between these North Country men and the miserable Camberwell rabble! I am ashamed of my late electioneering; it is a degrading business.'

Possibly because of his scorn of the Camberwell electors, and even more because he would neither couch his decided views in vague and politic terms nor curb his wit, his efforts failed. Later on when someone spoke strongly to him against Lord Randolph, he remarked that his 'experience of politicians was that the only honest ones were those who had no principles'. Such observations as this, however just, were too clever to give electors confidence—indeed they were partly responsible for all Blunt's political failures.

At the end of September a great Tory demonstration was held at Crabbet in a large tent in the Park. On November 12th he saw Churchill for what proved to be their last talk on an intimate footing as political allies. The following day Blunt declared for Home Rule in its full sense, avowing his intention of supporting Parnell in his demand for an Irish Parliament. 'I felt bound to do this,' he wrote later, 'but I

believe it cost me my election.' The policy was too complete not to frighten his constituents. Two weeks more and the struggle was over. 'All the last fortnight was occupied in heavy work,' he said, 'of which my wife, with her maid Cowie, took the lion's share, and I was helped by many personal friends from outside. But their devoted labours proved of no avail, and I lost the election by 162 votes out of 6,112 votes polled.'

For one reason in particular Blunt never ceased to regret this defeat: it left Lord Randolph Churchill, at that time the coming man in English politics, 'without any adviser in the ways of political virtue'. Had Blunt obtained a seat in the House of Commons he would, he thought, certainly have become one of Lord Randolph's most trusted lieutenants and might have prevented him from making the mistakes which eventually caused his downfall. He felt that he exercised over Churchill 'a very considerable influence', and might even have held him faithful to Irish Home Rule. Together they might have persuaded Lord Salisbury to adopt it as the Tory policy.

Two years of intermittent effort to obtain a seat followed the Camberwell defeat. Over twenty constituencies sounded him out, and eleven sent him formal invitations to become their candidate. Of these he accepted two, Kidderminster and Deptford. With the Camberwell electors he did not break for a month after his defeat. Churchill advised Blunt's going on with him; the Camberwell electors themselves besought him to renew his campaign; with no great enthusiasm Blunt consented. When Gladstone's new programme of Home Rule, published by his son, appeared on December 8th, however, it became amply clear that the place for supporters of Ireland was no longer in Tory ranks. By Christmas Blunt had decided definitely to retire from the Camberwell candidature. Even Churchill agreed that if he wanted Home Rule he must go to Mr. Gladstone.

The break left Blunt dispirited: 'Ambition is a poisonous thing, mere gambling; and this is the morning after'. His

position was anomalous. It seemed to him unlikely that the Liberals, and Gladstone in particular, would forgive his alliance with Churchill. On the issue of the moment, Irish Home Rule, his sympathies were entirely Liberal; otherwise they were as they had been, Conservative. When he said he was a Liberal people were inclined, he thought, to remember his career of the past few months; his friends objected when he spoke of himself as a Conservative. 'But what in Heaven's name am I?' he wrote desperately. Possibly there was a faint tinge of irony in the 'amiable message' sent through Skittles from the Prince of Wales hoping that Blunt will 'get into Parliament this time, whichever side it may be, 'as there is a want of gentlemen in the House.'

## 3

Mrs. Howard's welcome to him into the Liberal fold after his defection into Tory ranks was a good omen. The prodigal returned to pay a New Year's visit to her at Naworth Castle, arriving an hour or more before daylight. 'I had to walk from the station,' he wrote, 'a wild, blowy, pitch dark morning. But it is fortunately a quite straight road, There is something exciting about being out in the dark before the dawn, and I felt like a moss trooper on a raid. When I arrived at the old Border castle the door stood open and I had got upstairs before I met anybody, and then only a housemaid over whom I stumbled in a dark passage cleaning the floor. . . . All Naworth is unchanged, children, governesses, and tutors, in the same noisy order which surprised me the first time I came here. The racket does one good, and the discomfort, for all our evils come from too much ease and selfishness. At twelve we rode and got wet through, and in the afternoon played hockey.'

Among others, James Anthony Froude was a fellow guest at Naworth—'I never,' said Blunt, 'was more taken with



anyone than with Froude, from the moment he came into the room and spoke, for his voice is the most sympathetic in the world, and I am always attracted by old men.' They had much talk together, of course about Irish politics and a great discussion about Rousseau whom Froude condemned unsparingly. 'He said, "I hate him. I once got caught by him like a fly in treacle."' Blunt had the same feeling though he thought the *Confessions* 'a most beautiful book'.

The visit was altogether happy; riding, shooting, balls—everything turned out well. The tenants' ball especially delighted him: 'unlike other tenants' balls in that there was absolutely no *gêne* between host and guests. Mrs. Howard was there with all her children, from the eldest to the youngest, and all present seemed absolutely pleased.' Blunt departed refreshed, observing, 'The life of this house is like that of a Bedouin camp'.

Later in January the Liberal Government came in on Chamberlain's cry of 'three acres and a cow'. Blunt began intensive work for Irish Home Rule, arranging for the foundation of the British Home Rule League and making two journeys in Ireland in search of first-hand information. And, in early June, the Liberal whips asked him to stand as supporter of Gladstone's Irish policy. As it bound him to nothing beyond his own opinions, he decided to accept, although he doubted if a good constituency could be found for him. Two things as he said were against him, his quarrel with Gladstone about Egypt and more important, his Roman Catholicism which at the moment was a bar to Parliament because of the Irish difficulties. He was told at the Liberal office: 'We have a good many Catholic candidates on our lists, but the constituencies say "Give us a Jew, if you like, but not a Catholic."'

On June 8th the Liberals' Home Rule Bill was defeated and soon the general elections began. It was suggested that Blunt should bear the brunt of the proposed demonstration against Chamberlain by standing against him in his own West

Birmingham Division. Though there was no chance of victory, Blunt impulsively plunged again: 'This is a great undertaking, but it is useless to shrink from the battle when it comes. It is a good maxim to follow, "When you are in doubt to do a thing or not do it—*do* it."' He accepted the Birmingham invitation, published his address and prepared for his first meeting. Again the Liberal whips failed to support him, and the Birmingham electors, terrified by Chamberlain, did not dare, notwithstanding their favourable protestations, openly to attend even his first meeting. Disgusted—'these Birmingham people are miserable hares'—he retired, having lost his temper and told a number of truths concerning Chamberlain to the few brave enough to listen. Then, characteristically refusing to be downed, he took the train to Kidderminster in answer to the eager demands of the Liberals of that constituency.

Although he arrived, sound asleep in his carriage, well on in the night, the delighted Kidderminster electors received him with a great ovation. They carried through the whole campaign with the same enthusiasm; but, by the narrow margin of 288 votes, the election was lost. The Gladstonian rout was everywhere complete. Never, Blunt wrote, had he 'felt a defeat less for the campaign has not been thrown away and indeed we have done our best. The Home Rule candidates are falling all round us like ninepins, and, compared with most, our fight with Kidderminster was a capital one'. A year later the Kidderminster weavers presented him with a handsome carpet for the hall at Crabbet in token of the fight.

## 4

If he bore his own defeat stoutly, the general Liberal holocaust dismayed him. In common with all friends of Ireland he felt that it portended a long and perhaps hopeless delay for Irish Home Rule. And he was disheartened by his own

impotence in the Irish cause. There were circumstances, too, about this time, he wrote, which 'perplexed and worried me to the point that, as is often the case with men of imagination when they come to the turning-point between youth and age (and I was forty-six), I found myself disgusted with the emptiness of life's ordinary things, and entertained for a while a serious thought of retiring altogether from the world as dervish, monk, or hermit, notwithstanding the fact that I lacked the essential quality of a distinct religious faith'. He resolved to give up the phase of active life—a resolve that he was to make often thereafter, and as often to break—and betake himself to what he remarked was the rational end of all existence, the life contemplative. 'I am getting weary of politics,' he wrote to a friend, 'and feel the third stage of my life—the stage of contemplation—rapidly approaching, and I doubt whether I shall ever take active part in the world's ways again.'

In this mood, he decided to spend the winter at Rome towards which he was doubly attracted, by recollections of his childhood in Italy, and, still more, by his 'recent intercourse with those best representatives of Christianity in Europe, the Irish clergy and people'. He was curious, too, to discover the real attitude of the Vatican towards Irish politics.

Encouraged by Cardinal Manning who said 'You will get back there into the rut of centuries, and it will do you good', towards the end of October Blunt journeyed with Lady Anne to the 'Sacred City', a 'new pilgrimage' about which he composed a series of sonnets that were published three years later. 'How staid is Italy', he wrote,

no gardened rose

Scattering its leaves is chaster than she is.

No cloister stiller, no retreat more close.

There is a tameness even in her seas

On which white towns look down, as who should say,  
'Here wise men long have lived, and live to-day.' . . .

Yes, Italy is wise, a cultured prude.  
Stored with all maxims of a statelier age;  
These are her lessons for our northern blood,  
With its dark Saxon madness and Norse rage. . . .

At last I kneel in Rome, the bourne, the goal  
Of what a multitude of laden hearts!  
No pilgrim of them all a wearier soul  
Brought ever here, no master of dark arts  
A spirit vexed with more discordant parts. . . .

I kneel and make an offering of my care  
And folly, and hurt reason. Who would not  
In this fair city be the fool of prayer?  
Who would not kneel, if only for the lot  
Of being born again—a soul forgiven,  
Clothed in new childhood and the light of Heaven?

Taking up their quarters in the Piazza di Spagna, the Blunts made it their business to see much of clerical society, particularly of the Irish. Every one of the clergy at Rome, they found, except the English, sympathized with Ireland. They were on pleasant terms, nevertheless, with the representatives of English interests at the Vatican, Cardinal Howard and Monsignor Stonor; the latter advised and procured for Blunt an audience with the Pope. In *A New Pilgrimage* and again many years later Blunt described this audience. 'I had brought my old diplomatic uniform with me, I know not with what prevision, and it was in that dress that I went to the Vatican, where I was received by the Papal household with marked distinction. They thought, I believe, that I had some diplomatic mission, for Pope Leo was highly interested in the idea of a renewal of diplomatic relations with our F.O., and so I was admitted to the most private of private audiences. Be this as it may, my reception by His Holiness was of a kind which surprised and touched me almost to bewilderment when I heard the door shut behind me, and I found myself absolutely

alone with one so nearly divine, if there was divinity anywhere to be found on earth. . . . When I had kissed his feet he raised me up, though I continued kneeling and on his invitation spoke to him about Ireland . . . . What I cannot here altogether say is, that the personal interest he seemed to take in me, for he continued to hold my left hand with his own right hand and to press it to his knee, gave me the courage to speak of my own spiritual affairs as in a confessional and to ask his help. He could not give me all I asked, but when I left him it was in tears. I had been with him for over twenty minutes, and the chamberlains when I found myself outside the audience chamber, cast on me eyes of reproof for having been so long, and they seemed to guess to such little purpose.'

The Blunts saw something, too, of Roman society, and rode and hunted on the Campagna—'I can see him now,' wrote Esmé Howard in his *Theatre of Life*, 'after the day was over, with his hat off and his hair disordered by the wind, galloping over the Campagna like a mad man, giving me a display of how Arab sheykhs yelled when they were in pursuit of gazelles over the Arabian desert.' They visited the great farm and stud of Signor Piacentini, and spent a week as they were to do in future years, at Fogliano, beyond the Pontine marshes, the country house of the Duke and Duchess of Sermoneta. The most perfect country place, Blunt wrote, it had been his lot in a life of travel to see.

But try as he might to withdraw from politics, political discussion was inevitable and the news of the day inevitably stirred him. When word came in mid-January that Drummond Wolff had been ordered to make a final attempt to work out his Turkish convention, it seemed imperative that he should return to Egypt to find out what was happening politically. He wished, moreover, to look into the condition of his property there which had been left pretty much to go to ruin since 1882.

## 5

When Blunt had proposed in 1886 to go out to Egypt, Lord Salisbury, although he had withdrawn the order for Blunt's exclusion, had requested him to put off his journey because of the inflamed condition of public sentiment there resulting from Drummond Wolff's negotiations. Blunt's presence, it had been felt, would increase the unrest. Now, a year later, Blunt again notified Lord Salisbury of his intended journey and received a wire: 'Your letter received, Baring says no objection.'

To the Blunts the trip from Alexandria to Cairo, along the line of Egyptian flight after the bombardment in 1882, was melancholy enough. Nor was their scorn of the English occupation decreased by what they saw of its results. From Princess Nazli, a strong supporter of Arabi, and from other isolated individuals, they gained much information and on a week's camping trip to Tel-el-Kebir and the camp of Sheykh Saoud-el-Tihawi, Arabi's Bedouin betrayer, confirmed much that they already knew or suspected. Blunt came in touch, also, with the adviser of the Turkish envoy through whom he learned of the situation in regard to Drummond Wolff's convention.

At Sheykh Obeyd he found the trees much injured for lack of water and the whole garden sadly damaged. With the expenditure of £200 the garden could be brought back almost to its old perfection and 'if worst came to the worst in England', Blunt wrote, 'one could always make a living out of this garden, and, with £500 a year besides, live in it like kings.' Aid, his camel man, when notified that he was in Cairo, ran fifty miles to Suez and took train from there to tell him that his herd of camels was safe among the Towara Bedouins.

These matters had hardly been settled when he received an official warning from Valentine Baker Pasha that his visit to

Hajji Saoud had been reported to the police. The letter seemed to betoken further measures. Blunt was intensely annoyed: 'It is very absurd their having pitched upon this visit as a text for remonstrance, and I have written to Lord Salisbury expostulating. It is too absurd that I am to be put upon a sort of *parole*, and at the same time watched. For the future I shall give no pledges and take my chance of arrest.'

His disgust at this warning, and at learning that there was a long black list at Abdin Palace of people known to have spoken to him, was somewhat offset by his last days in Egypt spent at the Mowled held at Abu Seriyeh, three days' march through the desert southwards from Sheykh Obeyd. An immense concourse of Arabs and fellahin from all the western delta and the western lands above Cairo gathered there with no government supervision in the early March of each year. Desert life again absorbed the Blunts; in the East they found the peace that even Rome could not give them.

They returned to England refreshed in spirit. Undeterred by having spent quite £8,000 on politics within the last five years, Blunt allowed himself again to be drawn in; wrote letters about Egypt; made speeches to aid the cause of Irish Home Rule—among others one at the Oxford Union where he enjoyed himself 'amazingly', making many friends among the rising generation and writing afterwards, 'there is nothing in the world as agreeable as living with undergraduates at a university if you have any claim on their intellectual regard'; attended meetings of this sort and that, even acting as chairman, though only in the attitude of friendly neutrality, of a Women's Suffrage meeting.

In mid-July Drummond Wolff's Turkish convention entirely broke down. There seemed no use in struggling any more for Egypt and Blunt turned his whole political attention to Ireland. During the next few months he again journeyed to Ireland gathering information and taking part in meetings. A very imperfect party man, however, he severed in July his

party relations with Kidderminster and was in doubt whether or not to return to the Conservative fold.

Having decided to stick to the Liberals he was persuaded, late in the year, by his friend Sir John Evelyn,

. . . who lately stood in fight  
With the new dragons of the Primrose rite,  
And broke a lance for Ireland and the cause  
Of freedom, flouted by coercion laws,

to accept the candidacy of Deptford which Evelyn proposed to resign. Instead of conducting the campaign himself he again went to Ireland, held a proclaimed meeting, was imprisoned and sent up for trial, leaving the election canvassing to his wife and numerous enthusiastic supporters among whom, oddly enough, was Miss Gladstone. Nevertheless this, his third campaign, almost certainly would have been successful had he vindicated himself legally in Ireland. But just before the election he failed to win his case; the Deptford constituents were unable to withstand the blow; and again, for the third time, Blunt lost his contest, this time to Charles Darling, later Lord Darling of Langham.

It was the end of his excursion into domestic politics and his last attempt to enter Parliament. Though after his release in March 1888, several Irish constituencies tried to persuade him to stand for them, he consistently refused. He had always opposed Englishmen being given Irish seats as a danger to Ireland and would not permit an exception in his own favour.



## IRELAND

## I

BLUNT's Irish adventures were picturesque enough to encourage the belief that vanity and pleasure in making mischief were the sole motives of his political action. He himself protested,

God knows, 'twas not with a fore-reasoned plan  
I left the easeful dwellings of my peace.

He thought only 'to do a deed of chivalry, an act of worth', that might be recorded in the sight of his 'mistress Liberty', and of the nations.

Actually, the experience entailed hardship far too real and too inevitable to be undergone without genuine conviction. Any cause, furthermore, based like the Egyptian Movement on religious tradition and the claims of justice appealed to him, and the Irish cause was doubly sympathetic for, as he acknowledged, his Catholic upbringing had influenced him in favour of Catholic Ireland.

Disabled by his Camberwell defeat in 1885 from doing anything to aid the cause of Ireland through government channels, he set to work, as he had in the case of Egypt, to uphold it unofficially. He began to frequent the Irish National League office and to speak at League meetings until, on March 11th, he was unanimously elected a member of the League and was able to write with some satisfaction, 'I fancy I am the first Englishman of any position who has been accepted by them. They are all extremely good fellows, moderate and sensible in their views, and it is evident have no

unconquerable hatred for Englishmen.' Shortly before, with Lord Ashburnham, George T. Kenyon and Joseph Cowen, he had founded the British Home Rule Association—afterwards called the Home Rule Union—lending it his James Street house for temporary offices and his private secretary, Edward Hope, for secretary. He went up to Cambridge where, as the Union was afraid to sponsor him, he spoke for Home Rule at a special meeting and made strong allies of several undergraduate converts. And he composed a sonnet on Ireland—'Ireland's Vengeance'—which Knowles refused to publish in the *Nineteenth Century* not because he did not agree with Blunt that it was a good sonnet, but because, as he explained, he never accepted any poetry 'except from Tennyson and Mat Arnold, and had refused Swinburne last week'.

Morley's appointment to the Irish Secretaryship followed the Liberal victory in January and Blunt hoped that Irish hardships would be mitigated. Morley had written him that he would 'try to do his best in spite of Parliament, Party, the ignorant Press, and other devilries'. But as weeks passed, news came of more, rather than fewer, evictions. Blunt decided to visit Ireland to study the land question, so that he could 'bring the injustice of the Land Laws as administered by English insistence on legal ideas, foreign to the traditions and morality of the Irish peasantry, home to the London public'.

For most Englishmen such a tour would have presented difficulties. Not for Blunt. By temperament he was suited to it. Besides it was made 'possible and easy', he wrote later, by his anti-imperialism, his independence of party, his Catholic upbringing, and his position as an English landlord. He was 'no ignoramus, as nearly all the Radical supporters of Home Rule in the House of Commons were, in agricultural matters'. And, he added, 'there is no country in the world where social position carries more weight with it than Ireland'.

Hardly had Blunt arrived in Dublin and paid a round of visits to Archbishop Walsh and the Lord Mayor and others

when a telegram reached him at the National League Office begging him to go to Roscommon where evictions were under way. Without letters or any certain directions he started the next morning on what seemed 'a kind of goose chase' for the bogs of Roscommon. Following the safe rule, he went to the priest at Boyle, the nearest station to Roscommon, who promised to put him in the way of gaining information, although, for the moment, evictions had ceased.

Blunt soon grasped the fact that in this part of Ireland—and, he was to learn later, throughout the country—the land question was the important point. The people at Roscommon cared little for Home Rule apart from it. Home Rule was only a means to an end. What they wanted was low, fair rents.

Rent? Who speaks of the rent? We Irish, who till the soil,  
Are ever ready to pay the tribute your laws impose;  
You, the conquering race, have portioned to each his toil;  
We, the conquered, bring the ransom due to our woes.

Here is no case of justice, of just debts made or unjust.  
Contracts 'twixt freemen are, not here, where but one  
is free.

No man argues of right, who pays the toll that he must;  
Life is dear to all, and rent is the leave to be.

Blunt gathered particulars about the neighbouring estates, especially about Colonel King-Harman's; and drove out eleven miles in the pouring rain to Keadue to talk with evicted peasants. He then sent the first of a series of letters on Irish affairs to the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Considering that the trip to Roscommon had been unpremeditated, it had been most successful. But, not to waste time, Michael Davitt now made out an itinerary for him, gave him letters of introduction, and started him off again, through the icy cold wind and snow, to the north, to Gweedore. There the priest, Father McFadden, was holding a 'station'—in England it would be called a 'religious retreat'. He found the

little house where it was held packed with nearly a hundred people, men and women, and three cows and some fowls. 'Father McFadden was going round giving the communion, after which the priest's horse was also brought inside. It was a very curious and impressive sight, which I am glad to have seen. I have witnessed no such great faith anywhere—no, not in Arabia!'

From Gweedore, where the villages reminded him of a Bedouin camp, he travelled by jaunting car through picturesque but very poor country of granite and heath to Donegal, spending each night with the local priest. In Donegal he stopped with the Mayor and his family: 'His sisters, four enthusiastic young patriotesses, played the piano and sang "The wearing of the Green" to me, and other such melodies, and then made me give them a lecture on the Egyptian war and the Mahdi.'

Southward, down the coast through Sligo, he went to Ballaghderin, where he stayed with Mrs. Deane, first cousin of the Irish leader John Dillon, her adopted son, much of whose history she confided to Blunt. 'I have enjoyed my talks with Mrs. Deane more than anything yet, and they have been more instructive,' Blunt wrote. But within a day, journeying to Loughrea, he was stirred deeply by Dr. Duggan, Bishop of Clonfert. 'He is the most wonderful and enchanting old man I have seen for many years.' He lived in a dilapidated house called the Palace, waited on by an old peasant woman and a little foundling boy, giving his life and all he possessed to helping his people in the struggle for their rights. The state of Ireland was, to Dr. Duggan, one of war between peasants and landlords and in war he considered that all's fair that leads to victory, however unjustifiable such action might seem in time of peace. His austere life and passionate struggle touched Blunt and his wit delighted him.

They drove together to visit the site of Aughrim, the last battle fought by the Irish against William of Orange. "They call it the last battle," the Bishop said, as we stood on rising ground looking over the plain, "but this is not true, for the

battle has gone on ever since.”’ ‘I dined with him in the evening,’ Blunt related, ‘and still he talked and talked and always with a smile on his lips and tears in his eyes, till he made me also cry. . . . I afterwards described this talk with Dr. Duggan in “The Canon of Aughrim.”’ About this long and vigorous poem Lady Gregory wrote, ‘Sir William says the Canon is wonderfully good and will do a great deal of mischief which I know is the compliment you will really care for.’ It is Blunt’s vindication of the Irish Home Ruler’s point of view and rebellion.

Near by Loughrea was the village of Woodford, later to figure largely in Blunt’s Irish adventure, belonging to an absentee landlord the Marquess of Clanricarde. In the diplomatic service in former years Blunt had known Clanricarde well, first as Lord Hubert de Burgh, then as Lord Burke, and had seen him ‘pretty frequently at Paris in the ’sixties where he was one of the young men in attendance upon Skittles, and later when he had become Lord Clanricarde at the Travellers’ Club in London’. A month before Blunt’s arrival in Loughrea the process server, Finlay, had been murdered at Woodford. The village was seething with unrest and Dr. Duggan asked Blunt during the four days he stayed with him to talk over their grievances with the chief villagers, Roche, the hospitable miller who was to support Blunt so well later, and Keary, the respectable tradesman whose meadow was to figure importantly in his future history. With his gift for charming people and drawing them out Blunt not only worked them into a more conciliatory mood but obtained from them much useful knowledge of local conditions and, more necessary for the future, gained their confidence.

In response to a wire from Father Reddy that the evictions were to be renewed on Lord Kingston’s estate, Blunt sped to Arigna. ‘It was an absurd and brutal spectacle,’ Blunt noted in his diary of this first experience of evictions. ‘The sight made me so angry that I was positively ill, my heart hurting me. . . . When it was over for the day we went back and I

had some milk with Father Quinn. Though I am ill, I am glad that I came. No one can understand what the Irish question is till he has seen an eviction.' It was less the physical, bad as that was, than the moral effect of eviction that he deplored. The Canon of Aughrim told of an eviction:

This is the death of the body. . . .

Every eviction in Ireland brings one such physical loss. . . .

Not for these is my anger. . . .

But what of that other death for which love strews no roses,  
Death of the altered soul, lost, perished, forever gone?

'Deep in the gulf of your cities they lie, the poor lone  
creatures,

Made in God's image once, his folded innocent sheep,  
Now misused and profaned, in speech and form and  
features

Living like devils and dying like dogs in incestuous  
sleep.

On the third day at Arigna nobody was thrown out. At the fourth house proceedings stopped—'and high time,' observed Blunt. 'All this marching and counter-marching, this parade of armed men, has resulted in nothing more satisfactory for the landlord than the collection of about £20; this at the cost to the Government, we computed, of about £1,000. What absurd laws! What a ludicrous scheme of Government! I have written a letter to the *Pall Mall*, the strongest I ever wrote in my life; and, if Stead only publishes it, it will put a stop to all the atrocities.'

Blunt's letters to the *Pall Mall* had already brought two violent answers from Colonel King-Harman and a letter from Lord Kingston laying 'all the blame upon the League'. After the Arigna evictions Kingston asked Blunt to talk the situation over with him. Nothing useful came of the interview but it encouraged Blunt to offer to discuss matters with King-Harman also. The Colonel's reply was 'another preposterous

letter' that freed Blunt, he felt, from any duty of consideration towards him. After examining more of the Colonel's tenants, he was sure that he had enough evidence to smash King-Harman. Later, hearing from Sidney Herbert in London that King-Harman was thirsting for his blood, it occurred to him that the chivalrous solution was to send word that, if the Colonel wished, he would fight him. The idea appealed to his dramatic sense but Button said it would be 'ridiculous'.

All the great Irish landlords, Blunt found, on returning to London, felt that it was unnecessary to retell the well-known story of evictions, and were especially angry with him for his attack on Lord Kingston in the *Pall Mall Gazette*: 'Their anger, however, means that I have hit them hard, so I don't mind.' The Irish M.P.'s Healy, Dillon and O'Brien expressed themselves as delighted by Blunt's work and Morley congratulated him on his letters to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, saying that they had done excellent work. 'I am glad of this,' Blunt wrote, 'because Lady Gregory told me she had met Eddy Hamilton, who complained of my having put my oar in at the wrong time and done more harm than good. But Morley was very decided that I had done good work for Ireland.' It was a hard blow to his continuation of the good work to have Stead, the editor of the *Pall Mall*, overwhelmed by remonstrances and afraid of a libel suit, refuse to publish any more of his letters.

He was forced to have recourse wholly to speeches and conversation. In order to make his own position impregnable before renewing the campaign he consulted Bates, his bailiff, about his own farms at Crabbet. Bates confirmed his fear that they were rented too high and that his agent, Laprimaudaye, was too hard on the tenants. Forthwith, Blunt reduced the rents and left himself free to pluck the mote from the eyes of Irish landlords.<sup>1</sup>

## 2

His experience in Ireland had taught him that the Land League<sup>2</sup> was based upon necessity, and that it organized and restrained the people from outrageous acts rather than incited them; that the clergy were the backbone of the movement and kept it in hand; and most clearly, he had come to realize that 'it is absurd to argue that the landlord, who destroys a hundred families by evicting them, is guiltless because his act is *legal*, and that the peasant who resists or retaliates is a murderer because his blows are illegal. There must be a principle of justice underlying the law, or the law itself is a crime.'

These ideas were the result of an examination of a few parts only of Northern Ireland. He determined now to learn the situation in other parts of Ireland in order to strengthen a favourable public opinion for the forthcoming second reading of Gladstone's Home Rule Bill. Far less confident that the bill would pass than were Morley or the Irish M.P.'s with whom he discussed it, and fearful lest its failure would endanger Home Rule altogether, he started once more, in mid-May, for Dublin and the south of Ireland. His spirits were cheered on the journey by hearing two priests, who did not recognize him, praise his fight with King-Harman. And in Dublin, Michael Davitt spoke of his work with great warmth, saying that all the Irish party were enthusiastic about him. He had heard Parnell speak in such terms of Blunt's work that he was sure the Irish leader would value his opinion, and he urged Blunt to beg Parnell not to neglect the land struggle.

By Davitt's advice, he went first to Thurles to consult that staunch upholder of Nationalism, Archbishop Croke, on his further movements. The Archbishop described how he had broken the power of the landlords in his diocese by a stubborn resistance and blamed those Bishops who had refused to help the people against the landlords as the sponsors of crime.



When Blunt reached the 'moonlighting' district of Kerry where the priests had been forbidden by their Bishop to aid the people, he was convinced of the truth of the Archbishop's words. Only where the restraining guidance of an actively sympathetic clergy was lacking, it seemed to him, was crime rife. Blunt, speaking from a window to a large gathering, exhorted the people of Castle Island to patience, and explained 'how every outrage, down to the cutting off of a cow's tail was an injury just now to their cause.' And he had much conciliatory talk at a meeting where several moonlighters and one known murderer were present. 'I am convinced,' he wrote, 'that there should be no difficulty in ending the whole trouble if only a little humanity were used.'

Having examined Munster 'pretty thoroughly', Blunt went off for a short holiday in Paris and then retired to Crabbet for a rest. But he was down-hearted. Early in June he recorded in his diary: 'A raw cold day, but walked about in Burley's wood listening to the thrushes and blackbirds and felt dissatisfied. One certainly leads a solitary life in England as a country squire, and I am not sure that the Irish peasants with all their troubles are not happier.' The Home Rule Bill upset him. Its ups and downs were 'endless'. When at last it was thrown out on June 7th he felt that the Irish cause had undergone 'almost an irretrievable disaster'. 'The Arabs were my first political love,' he wrote, 'and I loved them passionately, but it was of no avail: it is coming to be the same for me with the Irish.'

As usual his activities drew jeers from those who did not agree with him. Lady Gregory, although she tried later to help him in prison, was by no means in sympathy with Blunt's Irish doings—the one break in their forty-years' friendship, and happily not a long one. She wrote to a friend at about this time: 'Oh, and I must tell you that Wilfrid Blunt who has been moonlighting in Ireland in the interests of the Land League had to leave suddenly because going there in Lent, as a good Catholic he was expected to fast like his entertainers,

but just like the stork and fox, they made up with whisky punch, while he (being a Mohammedan teetotaller) was set down to salt cod and cold water, and even on feast days he was not much better off as he won't touch the flesh of the pig on religious grounds.<sup>3</sup> So having lived off tea and toast for a fortnight his nerves broke down, and he has had to make a rush for Paris, and spend his time dining at the best restaurants, and now he feels well enough to begin a fresh campaign.<sup>4</sup>

During the two months of despair regarding things Irish, while he was contesting the election at Kidderminster and before he left for Rome, he continued to see much of the Irish M.P.'s of whom he wrote: 'These Irish members have more statesmanship in their little fingers than our Cabinet Ministers have in all their dull heads.' And shortly after the failure of the Home Rule Bill he attended a great mass meeting at Liverpool where he was well received and spoke for two hours—one of the best speeches he had ever made. Even during his months in Italy he continued to do what he could for the movement, writing to *The Times*, for instance, at Prior Glynn's urgent request, in support of Archbishop Walsh.

Not long after his return to England there was a great procession and demonstration in Hyde Park against Irish coercion which is described in his diary. 'Went up to London in the morning, and at two took up a dozen members of the Home Rule Union at Westminster in my break and joined the procession. We passed Northumberland Avenue, Pall Mall, St. James's Street, and Piccadilly, stopping to hoot at the Carlton Club and Brooks's—the last, at my suggestion, for the Liberal Unionists—and to cheer Mrs. Gladstone and her daughter Mary, who were sitting at a window in Piccadilly. Queen of Sheba and Halfa, though they had never been in London before, did their work well, and pulled the break gallantly. There was an immense concourse in the park, but we got through without difficulty, and took our places at platform 13. I took the chair and opened proceedings, and T. P. O'Connor spoke for half an hour with ornate Hibernian

eloquence. The socialists were close alongside of us, Davitt being their principal speaker. But there was a second platform for Morris's section, and I saw May Morris on their cart like a French revolutionist going to execution. . . . I suppose there must have been close on 10,000 round our platform to hear O'Connor. . . . A good many of these were Irish. But on the whole it was a fair political crowd, quite orderly and sober. During the whole afternoon I only saw one drunken man. . . . Frederic Harrison came to our platform afterwards. He said he could hear my voice plainer than any of the other speakers, which is satisfactory; but it was a lovely day for speaking, with very little wind, and all in our favour. Coming back I drove T.P. on the box seat, and we received a good deal of cheering. I went into the St. James's Club afterwards, and then to A's, a very different world; and altogether it has been a curious experience.'

His Irish speeches at this time were interspersed with speeches on Egypt—one, to his ironic delight, at the Palmerston Club at Oxford. Egypt had long since become the background of his political thought by which he reached his political judgments. But by mid-July he again turned wholly to Ireland. Cardinal Manning suggested that he might be of use in explaining to the Papal envoys the morality of the Plan of Campaign,<sup>5</sup> boycotting, intimidation, and other features of the Irish agrarian war, which they were being sent to Ireland to inquire into. The suggestion was no sooner given than, with characteristic impetuosity, it was seized upon. Blunt, taking with him as companion Arthur Pollen, an Oxford undergraduate and son of his old friend Mrs. Hungerford Pollen, went to Dublin the following day. After seeing Archbishop Walsh, he had a long interview with the Papal envoys. They were particularly impressed by the fact that he was an English gentleman and a landlord as well as an upholder of Irish Nationalism: 'This they said was "good testimony".'

One of the pleasantest happenings of this Irish visit was

a call on the wife of the Lord Mayor of Dublin—‘the Lady Mayoress’ as the butler called her—of which Blunt told in his diary: ‘She is a clever woman, with some wit, and amused us not a little. . . . It was curious to see the old-fashioned Dublin Mansion House, with its civic glories, its portraits of defunct English functionaries, and its ballroom built for George IV, inhabited by this little middle-aged Irish Catholic woman, who poked her fun at their pomposities, and pointed out to us the Harp deprived of the Crown. It was enough to make some of her predecessors of the Protestant Ascendancy turn in their grave. But these are the little revenges of history which console us for much injustice in the modern world.’

Both Michael Davitt and William O’Brien were in Dublin and by their advice Blunt and Pollen went down to Gorey to attend the trial of the eviction prisoners. A most impressive exhibition of cleverness and wit they found it. O’Brien followed them several days later and they all proceeded to Luggacurran where O’Brien spoke to a crowd of three thousand, Blunt refusing to go on the platform ‘though much pressed to do so’, or to allow Pollen to speak. ‘If the police had interfered,’ he wrote, ‘I should have made a protest; but there was really no call for English intervention.’

## 3

It was after this third trip to Nationalist Ireland and a holiday of grouse shooting in Scotland with Prince Wagram that Blunt’s notorious talk with Arthur Balfour, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, took place. They had a slight acquaintance, both being frequenters of the Wyndham circle where Blunt knew Balfour ‘chiefly as a lover of music and the fine arts, a pleasant talker, and an entirely amiable man of society’. Broadly speaking, no two men could have been further apart in point of view and way of thought, a divergence recognized by Blunt in explicit, characteristic terms in his *Land War in*

*Ireland*. Balfour, as Blunt wrote, belonged philosophically to a school of thought that 'bases its view of human things on what it considers to be the teachings of modern science'—the rule of the survival of the fittest.

To Blunt 'this was supremely repellent'. His own interpretation of the theory of evolution—which has already been given—was diametrically opposed to it. And his appreciation of 'the æsthetic' aspect of the case also conflicted with Balfour's views. 'As it applied to Ireland,' he wrote, 'what I had seen of the poor Catholic Celts convinced me that with all their poverty, and lack of comfort in which they lived, they were a happier people far than our English peasantry, even in Sussex, the most favoured of all counties; that they were social, joyous and dignified by their religion, and that as such they were both better fitted for the land in which they lived and which they passionately loved, than could be any new band of immigrants which could take their place from Scotland or England. The world would certainly be poorer for the loss of them. If I pitied them it was not for the poverty of their dwellings, for the broken thatch and the gaps in their walls letting in the rain, but for the English laws which were driving them from these happy homes, and for the grim fate that awaited them as outcasts in our English and American cities. On all these matters, Balfour and I stood a whole world apart.'

Early in September, when it was expected that the first strong measures under the Crimes Act<sup>6</sup> might lead to bloodshed at a National League Meeting to be held next day, Balfour and Blunt met again at the Percy Wyndhams' at Clouds. 'I am sorry for Dillon,' Balfour said at dinner, 'as if he gets into prison it is likely to kill him. He will have hard labour, and it will be quite a different thing from Forster's ridiculous imprisonments at Kilmainham. There is something almost interesting about Dillon; but it is a pity he lies so. He is afraid of prison, and he is right, as it will probably kill him.' What appeared to him to be the extreme cold-blooded cruelty of these remarks profoundly shocked Blunt and

impressed them on his mind ineradicably. In the evening the impression was deepened by Balfour's remarking that 'there is no more vain and foolish thing than remorse'.

The next day the two men 'had it out about Ireland'. Balfour maintained that Blunt exaggerated the extent and sincerity of the Home Rule movement which was not a genuine National one, but depended for its vitality on half a dozen men of influence. If they were got rid of the whole movement would collapse. Blunt asked him who these were 'and he named the chief Parliamentary leaders, especially Messrs. Dillon and O'Brien, and Mr. Michael Davitt. These could be dealt with through the operation of the Crimes Act if they dared to hold their ground. "But," he said, "they are afraid of prison and will leave the country".' Blunt objected, remarking that they would go to prison and that would strengthen the movement. 'Oh no,' said Balfour, 'it will be very different now. We are not going to have any such nonsense as Forster had. They will be quite differently dealt with. They will get severe imprisonment with hard labour—so severe that those who have not strong health will not be able to stand it. I shall be sorry for Dillon as he has got some good about him. He will get six months' hard labour, and, as he has bad health, it will kill him.'

Unaware of the consequences that this talk with Balfour was to have Blunt merely noted in his diary, 'it is rather absurd my being here playing tennis with the Chief Secretary on the very day and at the very hour of the Ballycoreen meeting, where he evidently expects bloodshed.' After leaving Clouds he went his usual way, making speeches and writing letters. Among other things he agreed—though as he said it was not much in his line—to support T. P. O'Connor in the management of a new halfpenny evening paper, the *Star*, of which for a year he remained a director. Learning of the fight at Mitchelstown while stopping with the Howards at Naworth Castle, he made up his mind to go again to Ireland. 'There are so many who have shirked committing themselves that, it

would be mean to hold back. I have so often resolved to wait for the first blood, and now it has been shed. Up to the present I have never been sure that the Irish meant fighting, or indeed that the Government would force it on. All the same, my flesh and blood rebel against any new political campaign of any kind at a moment when all my ideas are set on poetry, and when I had absolutely determined to hold myself free. There is, however, no help for it.' Mrs. Howard agreed with him. He decided to accept the suggestion of the Home Rule Union, which he had turned down a few days before, to join a deputation of their members to Ireland and started immediately for Chester to meet it.

The Parliamentary Leaders approved the deputation and concurred in its programme, but Blunt neither found its members congenial nor felt any keenness for its plan of action. Accustomed to work as a free lance he was impatient of the slower, more cautious methods of committees. For a few days he attended their meetings, in the intervals talking with his Irish friends. Soon he was glad to be quit of the deputies and accept Dillon's invitation to go with him to a closed meeting at Limerick.

About one hundred delegates convened at Limerick from various parts of the country to discuss ways and means for the coming campaign. It was a great occasion on which the policy of the League was to be declared. The first resolution was in protest against O'Brien's arrest and Dillon asked Blunt to speak to it: 'I was glad to do so,' Blunt wrote in his diary, 'as O'Brien has been in my head for the last forty-eight hours.' He was in fact writing the poem, later published among his Irish poems as the 'Song of William O'Brien', inciting Irish patriots to vindicate the faith for which O'Brien was suffering:

Patriots, rise! Take rank together,  
Fight for God and fight for man;  
In the stormy autumn weather  
Strike for freedom and the Plan.

He it was who taught you this,  
Here your stoutest vengeance is.

Within the next few days he sent it to O'Brien in Cork gaol. O'Brien wishing to make a test case in order to obtain decent treatment for political prisoners, refused every possibility of release from prison.

'His intention is,' Blunt wrote in admiration, 'to refuse the prison dress, even if they strip him and leave him naked, and to refuse every menial labour. Thus he will establish the claim of all political prisoners to proper treatment. But it will be hard work'—a prophetic statement and ironic on the part of one who was to follow so closely O'Brien's example.

After attending the inquest on the riots at Mitchelstown and O'Brien's trial—which seemed a farce with a foregone conclusion, dictated by Dublin Castle, of a three months' sentence—Blunt went to see O'Brien in prison and obtained his promise to appeal and give bail so as to continue his campaign, and also to let Blunt know whenever he arranged for a large demonstration. Blunt wished to carry on the war with the Irish leaders during the autumn, returning to Ireland with Lady Anne for the demonstration. 'George Lefevre tells me,' Lady Gregory later remarked to him with some malice, 'that Lady Anne was much more popular amongst the Irish Nationalists than you. They thought you "too aristocratic!"'

4

London again; and then a visit with Lady Anne and his daughter, arranged weeks before for the sake of taking George Wyndham to the Lyttons at Knebworth, seemed like 'returning from another world'. But this quiet world of poetry and talk was not to be Blunt's for long. In mid-October a letter came to him at Crabbet from O'Brien telling him of a meeting to be held at Woodford, County Galway:



'It will be on Lord Clanricarde's estate and in a "suppressed" district. The chances are that it will be "proclaimed", but that we will of course make provision for. If you would come in time to attend that meeting it would be a great advantage to us and I need scarcely say that your wife's co-operation would lay us under an additional obligation.'

No more was needed. Three days later found Lady Anne and her maid, Cowie, established in Dublin and Blunt away with O'Brien to his meetings in the company of another Englishman, James Rowlands, M.P. for a London Borough, and his wife and MacDonald, a *Daily News* correspondent. The approach to Woodford had to be managed with some care: at Tomgreany they held a small meeting in the course of which O'Brien announced casually, for the benefit of police reporters whom he knew to be in the audience, that he was spending the night with the village priest. The party retired to the priest's house only to creep down some hours later and steal away in the dark to Woodford.

Their approach to the village was signalled by the sudden lighting of bonfires. Presently all the country round was ablaze and they found themselves escorted triumphantly by an enthusiastic mob carrying on pitchforks clods of flaring turf dipped in paraffin. Alighting at Keary's house, O'Brien addressed the meeting from an upper window. 'It was a dramatic performance, which he concluded appropriately by burning a copy of the Lord-Lieutenant's proclamation, which forbade all public meetings in the district, and defying the impotence of the law.' Rowlands and Blunt also spoke. At two or three in the morning the meeting ended and they slept at Keary's house. Too late for the affair a large body of constabulary and a company of regulars arrived to occupy the village.

A week afterwards news reached the Blunts in Dublin that evictions had been renewed at Woodford and a girl's head broken in an affray with the police. It occurred to Blunt that the time had come for him to take action as delegate of the Home

Rule Union which had appointed him their representative 'to test the validity of the Crimes Act, especially in the matter of forbidding public meetings, which it was thought could best be done by placing the Government in the dilemma of having to arrest an Englishman for doing in Ireland what in England was admitted to be the right of every peaceable citizen.' He decided, with the approval of Dillon and O'Brien, to return to Woodford to hold, not a secret meeting such as the last, but a public and announced one.

Arrived at Woodford they found the evictions postponed and the constabulary departed for Portumna. Their host, 'the patriotic miller', John Roche, strongly advised that the meeting should be held anyway in the hope that it would stop the evictions completely. Together Blunt and Roche drew up a handbill of a meeting for the following Sunday, October 23rd, and got it printed at Loughrea. Blunt's name alone was to appear on the handbills as delegate of the Home Rule Union, but the Rowlands, who had also returned to Woodford for the evictions, agreed to sit on the platform. On the morning of the twenty-second the handbills were posted throughout the town and at Loughrea.

Late that night a wire came from O'Brien warning Blunt that the meeting had been proclaimed at Dublin and copies of the proclamation dispatched to Woodford. Fearing that the Rowlands might not be resolute, Blunt took counsel only with Roche how 'to make the meeting as far as possible an English one, and while defying the authorities publicly and unflinchingly, avoid for the Woodford townspeople the danger of their being fired on should soldiers be sent to reinforce the police against them'. The responsibility was heavy. Finally they arranged to hold the meeting in Keary's meadow, a paddock of two or three acres close to the High Street but not adjoining it, whence the police could not eject them on the pretence that they were obstructing the thoroughfare; and to call the meeting for the point of two so that, all things being behind time in Ireland, no great crowd would assemble. Blunt was to write

'to the Chief Constable challenging his right to intervene by force, and so raise the whole question of the validity of the Lord Lieutenant's orders'.

The letter was all but ready at dawn when the Roche children, sent out to scout, brought word that the village had been occupied by one hundred and fifty constabulary and a company of H.M. Scots Guards. 'This,' in Blunt's words, 'was doing us honour beyond all we could have hoped, and placed our little meeting on an almost heroic footing.' Father Roche, the miller's brother, at Mass exhorted the assembled population of Woodford to attend the meeting, paying no attention to the Proclamation.

Leaving just time enough for a reply to be returned before the scheduled hour of meeting, Blunt sent off by two new arrivals—Fagan, a Norfolk ex-parson, and Macer Wright—to Inspector Byrne, the Divisional Magistrate in command of the police, and to Major Frere, in command of the regulars, copies of his letter in answer to the Proclamation. A reply came in the shape of Inspector Byrne himself who asked Blunt if he had read the Proclamation and understood that holding a meeting would be illegal. Blunt, in return, asked if Byrne had read his letter and declared that he would act according to his own judgment.

At two o'clock the procession formed: Lady Anne, Blunt, Rowlands and his wife, Fagan, and Macer Wright, with Sheehy, Roche, Keary and others to escort them to the platform. As they had calculated, only one or two hundred townspeople managed to assemble in time. When the procession reached the meadow, Byrne and four of his constables contested their entrance. Keary turned the tables by protesting against Byrne's trespassing in his meadow. Unprepared for this, the magistrate allowed the procession to reach the platform before waving to the main body of his men to advance. Wasting no time in preliminaries, Blunt began to address the assemblage but was immediately interrupted by Byrne who mounted the platform, asked Blunt formally whether he was the

same Mr. Blunt whose name had been printed on the handbills as calling the meeting, and informed him that he was Division Magistrate Byrne, that the meeting was illegal, and that it was his duty to prevent it. Blunt answered briefly, 'it is my duty to hold it', and with no more ado resumed his speech. He had uttered no more than three words, 'Men of Galway!' when a rush was made at him from behind and, with the whole group of dignitaries except Father Coen, he was pushed off the platform by Byrne and his satellites.

The constables began batoning the crowd. Seeing the platform unguarded, Blunt, followed by Lady Anne, hastily mounted and began to speak again, although everyone was too busy to listen. A 'pushing match' ensued between Blunt and Byrne while Blunt continued to speak. Byrne was obliged to call for help. Seven or eight constables ran back and, laying hold of Blunt, dragged him to the edge of the platform and, again, they all toppled off, fortunately, only four feet to the ground.

Being prepared for all this, Blunt did not lose his temper; nor had he much to complain of in the way of undue violence shown towards himself by the constables. 'Byrne alone among them,' Blunt wrote afterwards, 'was brutal, and towards Lady Anne . . . Anne had during the whole affair obstinately clung to me, and he, seizing her from behind by the throat, hurt her considerably in his attempts to drag her off. Once on the grass and in their hands, I lay there passive, while Anne, who thought me injured, adjured them to stand off; and they would have let me go had I been so minded. But my mind was now made up to push things to their ultimate issue and force them to arrest me, and while they were hesitating what to do I jumped to my feet and facing a band of them drawn up in front of us, I shouted suddenly: "Are you all such damned cowards that not one of you dares arrest me?" It had the desired effect, and one of them, Sergeant Wade, thereupon came forward and, laying his hand on my shoulder, arrested me. "It is all right now," I whispered to Anne. "Come along." And so, they marched us off.'

All was not over, however, On leaving the field, the peasants began to throw stones and the constables, when one of them was hit, made a baton charge in the street on the way to the Court House. Keary got knocked over the head and Roche, who defended himself with a blackthorn, was arrested. But Frere and the Scots Guards were not called upon.

That evening Blunt was 'brought up with Roche before a local J.P., charged with resisting the police,' was committed, and offered bail on condition that he would hold no further meeting that night. This he refused 'on the ground that the proclamation had been irregularly drawn, it having been stated in it that certain informations had been sworn as to the intended meeting which were "false, perjured, and untrue", and so was in itself invalid'. Whether this was good law Blunt did not know, but it was rejected as a reason and he was ordered to be sent to Loughrea and lodged there with Roche that night in gaol.

## 5

The story of the night's drive to Loughrea is a lurid one of demonstrations of sympathy, bonfires, torchlight processions, large rocks rolled into the roadway, throngs pressing up to the doors of the brougham to seize the prisoner's hands and curse the constables. It culminated as they neared the prison doors: Blunt saw a man from the crowd spring like a wild-cat on the the box-seat and, quick as lightning strike the constable who was driving them a blow, as Blunt thought, with a stone—it was really a dagger—and disappear into the night. Inside the prison those in charge questioned Blunt about this attack, but 'the morality of the gaol', he wrote, 'had already claimed me from the simplicity of truth, and I denied stoutly having seen anything'. A great feeling of peace descended on him; his responsibility was over; he wished only for sleep.

Two removable magistrates, 'amateurs of the law', were

set to try Blunt's case, one, a Limerick grocer, and the other, 'a decayed racing man, who, on the very day on which he was sentencing me was having judgment delivered against himself for debt in the Court of the Queen's Bench'. 'They were entirely ignorant,' wrote Blunt, 'yet the case they were set to try was one of extreme constitutional complexity, needing high magisterial ability.' The only evidence adduced against Blunt in court was the testimony of the police that resistance had been shown. After declaring the Proclamation to have been issued under the Crimes Act and finding that decision to be untenable, the two magistrates fell back on a reference to the Common Law, and in the end gave judgment on the astonishing ground that 'all resistance to the police was unlawful'. They refused cross summonses against Byrne and the police and against Balfour as representing the Dublin executive, and sentenced Blunt to two months' imprisonment—leaving it doubtful whether with or without hard labour—'subject only to appeal to Quarter Sessions'. Blunt appealed and was released on bail.

That night Lady Anne and Blunt stopped with Dr. Duggan, who to Blunt's elation hailed him as a martyr. Outside the palace gates the town and country people gathered in a surging torchlit crowd. The bishop, 'casting prudence to the winds, addressed them from the steps in words' which had, Blunt fancied, 'seldom been uttered in such strength on any occasion by episcopal lips'.

Blunt's first act on returning to London was to consult Sir Charles Russell, 'the greatest luminary at that time of the legal world, and the lawyer most trusted by Gladstone and the Liberal Party'. Reviewing Blunt's written statement of the case, which included the text of the Proclamation and the text of his letters to Byrne and Frere, Sir Charles Russell pronounced Blunt's 'attitude and action in the affair to have been a perfectly correct one', and his letters 'in entire accordance with the maxims of the Common Law'. This opinion was embodied some days later in a document signed by Sir Charles

Russell, H. H. Asquith (later Prime Minister and Earl of Oxford and Asquith), Robert Reid (later Lord Chancellor Loreburn) and W. S. Robson (later Attorney-General and Lord Robson)—all of them Queen's Counsels and M.P.s. Blunt also told the tale of his adventure and submitted to cross-questioning at a public meeting under the chairmanship of Schnadhorst, chief organizer of the Liberal caucus. He stood the test to the entire satisfaction of the audience who 'formally acknowledged me as having rendered good service to the Liberal Party and the cause of Home Rule'. In a moment Blunt had become a political lion.

Of expressions of sympathy from many friends on the news of his arrest, none was more welcome than from Lord Randolph Churchill 'who took public occasion to say some pleasant words' in Blunt's favour, even though they were parted politically. Blunt's undergraduate friends at Oxford wired him their congratulations; and at Cambridge Herbert Vivian, aged about twenty, announced his secession from the Tory Party, a conversion which to Blunt's amusement was 'accepted as a serious political event by the *Daily News*'. Blunt's cousin, George Shaw-Lefevre, later Lord Eversley, a strong Gladstonian and Home Ruler among the front bench Liberals, took up his cause with great vigour, continuing to uphold him even when rough weather came. W. J. Evelyn of Wotton insisted upon vacating his Deptford seat in order that Blunt might stand for it. Sir William Harcourt, with whom Blunt was not yet personally acquainted, asked him to join him in a tour of the North of England.

The touring party was an amusing one: 'Harcourt himself a sympathetic and jovial personality was the best of good company . . . and he and I', Blunt wrote, 'speedily made friends, and remained so I am glad to remember, for many pleasant years until his death. . . . Thorold Rogers was another of our company, a story-teller, too, but of a less pleasant order; and for some nights we enjoyed the companionship of that prince of humorists, Sir Wilfrid Lawson, whose role it was

on one or two occasions to introduce me to his constituents as “a convicted lawbreaker”, and “criminal under Mr. Balfour’s Act”.’ As ‘Balfour’s Criminal,’ Blunt was received everywhere with enthusiasm, and enjoyed ‘a short-lived popularity as such entirely at variance’, he wrote, ‘with the general experience of my public life, but which Harcourt declared to be for the moment “second only to Gladstone’s”.’



## BALFOUR'S PRISONER

## I

EARLY in the new year, 1888, Blunt left London to surrender to his bail at Portumna, County Galway, half hoping that he would lose his case, for he dreaded being free to canvass Deptford. In his ignorance he thought that 'as a first-class misdemeanant with leave to edit a new volume of poems', he would be 'absolutely happy'. He went fortified against the extremities of prison treatment 'by a double recommendation, temporal and spiritual': Sir Andrew Clark, Gladstone's medical adviser and privileged friend, had 'thumped and sounded' him and given him a letter of hygienic advice to be handed, when the time came, to the prison doctor; Cardinal Manning had bestowed upon him his archiepiscopal blessing and promised if the worst befell he would travel to Ireland to see him; and he was accompanied to the trial by a host of friends, both men and women. All the London newspapers reported it as an event of importance because, if the sentence were reversed on appeal, Balfour would lose credit even with his own side, where there were so many anti-coercionists. It 'was a test case by which the success or failure of Lord Salisbury's plan of "twenty years of resolute government" and his nephew's Coercion Act would be gauged'.

A few days before the trial the Blunts learned from Lady Alice Gaisford that Lord Salisbury had said to her that he thought they could not imprison Blunt, as the Woodford meeting could not be proved illegal, and 'in reply to her further question as to the Proclamation had explained, "Oh that was to amuse Arthur Balfour".' Blunt's Irish advisers, on the

other hand, said that, law or no law, the sentence would be confirmed: Mr. Justice Henn, a County Court judge, empowered under the Crimes Act to decide without a jury, was to try the case and would do what the Chief Secretary ordered him; evidence or lack of evidence would carry no weight. The only shadow of doubt on the result was whether the authorities at Dublin would push a case, 'so doubtful a one in law, to an extreme issue'.

The trial lasted for the better part of a week. Tim Harrington and The Macdermot—'capital fellows both, who gave their services gratis, but not for that the less ably'—were counsel for the defence. They could make no headway; it was clear from the beginning that Mr. Justice Henn had determined on a conviction; and the imposition of the full sentence of an ordinary prisoner was delivered on the fifth day. 'For the first time in the affair,' Blunt wrote, 'I recognized that I had a possibly serious fight before me, with incidents deserving good Dr. Duggan's name of martyrdom. It was an inspiring thought which lightened that dark January afternoon.'

Blunt's journey by train to the County gaol at Galway had to be made under strong escort, for the whole countryside was in an uproar, not far from revolt, and trouble was apprehended. 'By an act of grace,' Lady Anne was allowed to go with him to Galway and, he said afterwards, 'it was a strange and emotional sensation to find ourselves the object of passionate regard and demonstrative affection among a people embittered against us by centuries of wrong-doing. . . . Once more the thought surged strongly in me of how noble a thing it was that I should have been called to suffer something, however little, of ignominy and pain in expiation of my country's crime. Let who will count this as an exaggeration of vanity, it was not such that day.'

Blunt's feeling is recorded in the sonnet 'From Caiaphas to Pilate I was sent' that appeared in the thin volume of Irish poems published in 1889. Although the volume contains 'The

Canon of Augrim', 'Remember O'Brien' and 'Poor Erin', a lament—

What have you done that men hate you so?  
You have clung to your God while the rest despairing  
Bowed their souls in the house of woe—

it is made up chiefly, as its title '*In Vinculis*', suggests, of the sonnets composed in prison on the flyleaf of his Bible. These Lady Gregory especially commended and to his delight observed that she thought the portrait of Blunt which appeared as frontispiece was 'a libel. It looks like a villain; but that you wouldn't mind'.

The book is interesting but poetically not of the first water. It is dedicated 'to the priests and peasantry of Ireland who for three hundred years have preserved the tradition of a righteous war for faith and freedom', with an acknowledgement in the preface of Blunt's 'deep gratitude towards them, not for their sympathy only, and this was great, but for much else which, though difficult to express, will be divined in their perusal'. In the preface he wrote also: the poems 'record an episode in the writer's life to which, in spite of many austerities and some real suffering, he cannot look back otherwise than with affection. Imprisonment is a reality of discipline most useful to the modern soul, lapped as it is in physical sloth and self-indulgence'.

A prison is a convent without God.  
Poverty, Chastity, Obedience  
Its precepts are.

'*In Vinculis*' is an important part of Blunt's spiritual autobiography. It does not, of course, tell the whole story. The actual events of his life during the years 1886-8—all, that is, of legitimate public interest—Blunt related in *The Land War in Ireland* which he composed largely from his diary save for the two months in prison. He was able to keep no diary in gaol to his extreme regret since each day's impressions there were

'a curious psychological experience'. His only record was the contraband letters scribbled on fragments of tissue paper and conveyed by kindly warders from time to time to his friends outside.

The English prison system in Ireland at that time denied 'the simple amenities of pen, ink, and paper allowed in every age and in all other countries by even the most autocratic kings, princes and potentates to political offenders'. Without pencil and paper he had no occupation with which to turn his imprisonment to real spiritual profit, nothing to do but brood and become embittered. The physical punishment is practically nothing, he wrote, but the mental punishment, the effect of an accumulation of small indignities, 'is a black discipline that crushes the prisoner's soul'.

## 2

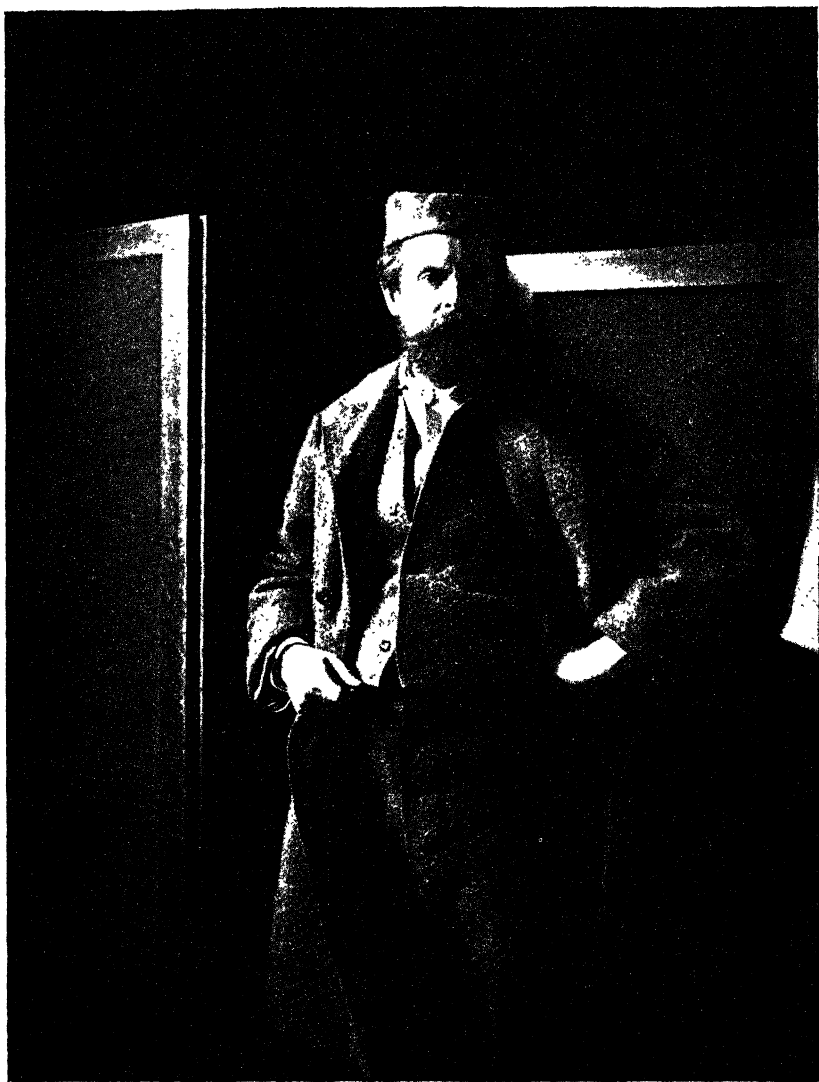
Galway gaol was a rambling structure, old-fashioned, and in so far as a gaol can be, homely—'not without its attraction to an imaginative mind'. Blunt's cell was 'fairly well lighted, showing a good patch of sky and the windows of the house opposite, the gaol Governor's, where occasional glimpses could be had of ordinary human life and pleasure got by watching the seagulls as they hovered overhead, and the jackdaws and sparrows on the look out for scraps of prison food'. Discipline was lax and the warders friendly. 'You see, sir,' said Denby, Blunt's warder, pointing to the copy of the prison rules adorning the walls of the cell, 'you see, sir, these regulations have not in them much sense. They are supposed to be applied to everyone who comes here, whoever he may be, and whatever may be the reason. But you will understand, sir, that it is impossible for us warders to act up to this and not make exceptions. . . . We are obliged to distinguish between case and case, and it is not often we have a gentleman like you here, but when we do we know how to consider him. Why sir, it

was only last year we had just such another case as your own, a gentleman from Dublin who had had a misfortune like yours—he had signed another gentleman's name thinking it was his own, and he was here with us for some months. How was he to be sweeping out his own cell? We could not let him do it any more than I can you; a case, sir, just like yours.'

Blunt was allowed not only to have his cell swept out each morning by a fellow prisoner, but also to retain his own long frieze overcoat and shoes and a rug that had accompanied him in his travels, and to sit cross-legged on his blanket on the floor instead of perched upright on a stool, dispensations that enabled him to keep moderately comfortable and to imagine himself stormbound in his tent in the desert. Even the chief warder relaxed discipline sufficiently to leave with him sometimes a copy of the *Freeman*; and the Governor of the gaol would prolong his daily visit to a quarter of an hour to give Blunt the news, somewhat bowdlerized for prison consumption, but still news.

With these slight mitigations, his early days in prison were spent happily enough, occupied with the hard labour of picking oakum—which he liked doing sufficiently well to hide a bit of rope's end on Saturday night to pick on Sundays when penal labour was forbidden—and in reading the Old Testament. The regulation prison Bible was well nigh illegible owing to its small print, but the Bishop of the Diocese not only availed himself of his right of entrance to visit Blunt daily with 'little consolations of snuff' but used his prestige to obtain for him a good quarto volume of the Douay Bible and with it the *Imitatio Christi*. In the Old Testament he found much political solace, in 'its violences of malediction on the oppressors and its obstinate faith in God's ultimate justice and His vengeance on the unrighteous'; and through it he could escape from 'the squalid miseries' of his 'actual state into the free air of the desert'.

It was not long, however, before he ceased to be capable of passing his days contentedly for the nights began to break



WILFRID BLUNT IN PRISON DRESS



down his resistance. In January, darkness fell early and morning came late, and during those interminable cold hours of total blackness—for there were no lights—he lay with insufficient covering on his unyielding plank bed. With no exercise during the day to tire him, he was able to sleep for only one or two hours. The prison clock, striking nine in the evening, woke him, and he passed the remainder of the night in restless brooding. 'A very few of such blank nights were enough to affect my mental balance.' He began to lose his sense of proportion and little matters annoyed him and preyed upon his mind.

Soon a very real grievance cropped up. News of Blunt's having been seen in his own great coat reached the Prison Board at Dublin and the Governor of the gaol, who had been admonished for the irregularity, began systematically to try to persuade him to give up his greatcoat and his carpet for the regulation short round jacket and prison blanket. Considering the prison garb inadequate, Blunt consistently refused. On January 13th the dispute came to a head. Blunt's coat was taken by force. As he was entitled to do, he demanded to see the visiting justices the next morning to explain his case.

The memory of his conversation with Balfour about letting Dillon die in prison had begun to work on his mind. He had heard that O'Brien and John Roche had been arrested again, and he determined 'in order to obtain humaner treatment for all political prisoners', to fortify his complaint of the violence resorted to in his own case by repeating to the justices the words Balfour had used to him four months before at Clonds, words that now seemed to him 'likely to be fulfilled in their literal meaning', if not towards himself, towards others.

Robed only in the blanket from his plank bed, Blunt appeared to make his deposition. Somewhat to his surprise the justices seemed for the most part to be sympathetic, owing, Blunt deduced, to the fact that Lord Clanricarde was almost as unpopular among his own landlord class in Galway, to which the justices belonged, as with his Woodford tenants,



for they felt that he had brought discredit on them. And 'they found it wrong that a man of their own rank in life, a squire and owner of broad acres, should be treated with less than the respect due to him as such, even in prison'. They knew of Blunt as a breeder of horses and looked upon his action at Woodford as an eccentricity almost of a sporting character, such as one of themselves might have indulged in in a gay moment. Strongest of all, perhaps, in his favour, Blunt thought, was an appeal made to some of them by Lady Gregory, whose family—she was a Persse—was an important one in Galway town, and whose husband, Sir William Gregory, had been for many years member for County Galway. Lady Gregory's own theory, on the other hand, was that Blunt's charm won the Irish hearts of the justices. In any case the effect of the hearing was to secure Blunt an overcoat exactly like his own except that it was made of regulation material.

His action concerning Balfour's conversation, he thought later, 'whether justified or not, was among the causes, perhaps the strongest', of the mitigation of Balfour's severity: by the end of the year political prisoners 'all wore their own clothes and were relieved from menial duties'. 'Though my own conscience did not wholly acquit me of hitting below the belt, I could not regret having spoken out.' Nevertheless, while he was still in prison, rumours of the storm that his action had raised in England much troubled him. Newspaper reports of his deposition were naturally garbled since he had been permitted neither to write it out himself nor to have it taken down word for word. He learned that Balfour 'denied, in the way public men deny such things', the accuracy of his account, and that the social clique, of which Balfour was the centre, and which to some extent was also his own, inveighed against a 'betrayal of an after-dinner conversation'. Not only Tory, but Whig circles reproached Blunt. 'Almost alone among the high political people' his cousin George Shaw-Lefevre, later Lord Eversley, did not cease to work in Blunt's behalf. What worried and depressed Blunt particularly was the fact that his

own nearest relations, the Wyndhams, blamed him most severely. He was anxious also about his Deptford candidature, which, he felt, demanded that he should make some rejoinder. But the letter that he managed to write and have conveyed to his 'ever loyal friend Evelyn' for some reason or other was not published.<sup>1</sup>

## 3

In the second week of February the civil action filed in Blunt's name by the Irish National League against Byrne for assault on Blunt at Woodford, was to come on in the Dublin Four Courts. In order that he might be at Dublin to give evidence, Blunt was transferred, under police escort, through demonstrations in his honour at Galway and Dublin and at various points on the railway journey, to Kilmainham gaol.

A forbidding, up-to-date prison, Kilmainham was scientifically designed for prisoners' greater tribulation and complete surveillance. It was built with repellent regularity of glass and iron, and circular, 'with a kind of conning tower' in the centre where the man in charge sat like a spider watching for infringements of the regulations. The officials in charge corresponded with the building. Their attitude was that of masters towards servants. In a grim world of 'stupefying silence' Blunt's last weeks of prison passed in black melancholy, made the denser by the glimpses of the outer world and his friends given him at the trial, and especially by the knowledge that just outside, in the Viceregal Lodge, his cousins, the Wyndhams, were disporting themselves gaily.

The position of George Wyndham, Balfour's young private secretary, was one of considerable delicacy: not only was he Blunt's cousin and friend but, a few months before, Blunt had refused his request to spend a week-end at Crabbet to meet T. P. O'Connor fearing that such a visit might compromise Wyndham's political position with Balfour. It troubled him

therefore at the time of Blunt's arrest to find it, in allegiance to the oppressor, 'on the whole . . . far better not to write to Blunt'. Now he exclaimed, 'Wilfrid is apparently temporarily out of his senses, but I can hardly believe he has said all that is attributed to him'.

The trial this time was to be decided by jury. He had been condemned in the criminal action at Portumna by a single judge without the protection of a jury. Now in the counter-action at Dublin before a civil court he could only succeed by obtaining a jury's unanimous vote. One voice against him would give the case to the Crown. Proceedings opened on February 11th in the Court of Exchequer with the Chief Baron Palles as judge and, as attorney-general, 'the notorious Peter O'Brien, better known as "Peter the Packer"', on account of his skill in packing juries for the Government in political prosecutions'.<sup>2</sup> Tim Healy, and The Macdermot again, defended Blunt. 'He did not take a feather out of you was Tim Healy's 'encouraging word' to Blunt after the cross-examination. In his summing-up, the Chief Baron Palles treated Blunt 'as a well-meaning but ignorant Englishman who had blundered into an illegal position . . . and had no ground of action against the guardians of law and order if they fulfilled their duty in using force to prevent any breach of the peace his action might occasion'. He admitted the prisoner's good intention, but dwelt on his avowed approval, which he pronounced 'Criminal Conspiracy', of the Plan of Campaign. 'Nevertheless,' Blunt noted later, 'I should have certainly won my case but for Peter the Packer, who had justified his nickname by a severe exercise of the right of challenging the jurors on whom he could rely.' Though eleven of the twelve were for Blunt, the twelfth, a Quaker (whom Peter the Packer had placed on the jury) stood obstinately against him. The unanimous verdict needed could not be obtained and Blunt was non-suited.

The feeling was fairly general that if the verdict at the trial had gone for Blunt, establishing the legality of his action at

Woodford, not only would he have been returned to Parliament but the back of Irish coercion under the Crimes Act would have been broken. Balfour could hardly have remained Chief Secretary for Ireland, and things would have taken a happier turn for Home Rule. The importance of the issue provoked deep public interest in the trial during the five days it lasted. Crowds cheered the van in which Blunt was daily driven through the streets to and fro. He was the newspaper hero of the hour and in his weak state found the position 'strangely emotional'.

## 4

The deep discouragement of failure and the bitterness of return to gaol were made more desperate a few days after the trial by news that the Deptford election was lost. The last twenty days of imprisonment seemed to him a whole year of mental suffering likely to drive him mad if they had been prolonged. He could not sleep, and for the first time in his life found his eyesight failing and grey hairs in his beard. The halo of martyrdom which he felt surrounding him in Galway gaol had faded away along with his 'little attempts at piety' and his trust in an ultimate justice. He ceased even to look forward to his release. The days were an endless waiting for something that did not come, and which, when it came, he knew would bring no pleasure.

During the trial the thought of vengeance on his political enemies had dominated his mind, 'engrossing as the indulgence of a vice'; now he was given a slate, and he spent hours constructing unpleasant anagrams of the names of those he hated—Balfour's in particular. In the last few days his depression alarmed the prison doctor and orders were given to provide him with a secular book for light reading. Unfortunately the Chaplain chose Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*, the least consolatory of romances, as Blunt remarked, for a prisoner's soul.

It added to his nightmare 'a violent sense of the injustice of mankind and a resolve from that time forth to live my life apart from its ungenerous ways'.

On the morning of March 6th his prison term came to an end. He was taken, according to custom, to the Governor of the gaol, Mr. Beer. Instead of the usual moral advice given by the Governor to a released prisoner, Mr. Beer announced that he and his wife had decided, in memory of Blunt's 'visit to Kilmainham', to christen their son, born the previous night, by the prisoner's name, Wilfrid Blunt. Blunt replied that he 'was much honoured' by the Governor's 'appreciative choice', shook hands with him and retired. The prison doors were unlocked and he found himself once more with his wife and a group of friends in the street.

Soon after entering prison, he had written:

Here at the gate I lay down my life's treasure,  
My pride, my garments and my name with men.  
The world and I henceforth shall be as twain,  
No sound of me shall pierce for good or ill  
These walls of grief. Nor shall I hear the vain  
Laughter and tears of those who love me still.

Now he realized the full meaning of the sufferings he had but imagined in his first exaltation, and his attitude towards life had changed. In the last two sonnets of *In Vinculis*, he wrote:

Farewell, dark gaol. You hold some better hearts  
Than in this savage world I thought to find. . . .  
Your law is not my law, and yet my mind  
Remains your debtor. It has learned to see  
How dark a thing the earth would be and blind  
But for the light of human charity.  
I am your debtor thus and for the pang  
Which touched and chastened, and the nights of  
thought  
Which were my years of learning. . . .

If but for pride  
And the high record of these days of pain,  
I will not be as these, the uncrucified  
Who idly live and find life's pleasures vain.  
The garment of my life is rent in twain,  
Parted by love and pity.

Even yet his tribulations were not over. On his return to London he found himself sadly unpopular among those very Liberals who, a short month before, had been so ardent in his favour. To add fuel to the flame he allowed Gladstone, at the time very bitter against Balfour, to persuade him, contrary to his better judgment, to republish the account of the Clouds conversation and renew his charges against Balfour. Then, 'disappointed in the truth', which was of course less exaggerated than the story that had grown from Blunt's prison statement, Gladstone failed to support him in public.

## 5

With the loss of the Deptford election he lost the possibility, at any rate in the immediate future, of entering Parliament. Though seats here and there were offered to him, it was fairly obvious that he could not hope to win an English seat, and he refused to contest an Irish one. Parnell had failed to uphold him in his struggle against Balfour and the Crimes Act and, alone of all the Irish leaders, gave him no sign of sympathy on his return from prison.<sup>3</sup> Yet Blunt paid generous tribute in *The Land War in Ireland* to Parnell's courage and value to Ireland. When the 'great crash' came his analysis of Parnell's character and the causes of the tragedy was singularly perspicacious, his judgment, just but merciful.

Before abandoning the Irish stage, Blunt paid his debts of gratitude for Irish kindnesses, and carried out his promise to see his friends Dillon and O'Brien through their trials and

imprisonments. His advice concerning the Papal Rescript condemning the Plan of Campaign and his work as 'liaison officer' in informing Gladstone and Cardinal Manning and the Irish leaders of each other's opinion, were of considerable value. But his two tours in May and June when he revisited the places associated with his imprisonment, made many speeches and was feted as 'a new liberator', were of little public importance. It was with some relief that he turned away from Irish affairs. He continued in occasional touch with the Irish leaders, but not for many years did he render them further service and not till 1912 did he write and publish his account of his Irish experience in *The Land War in Ireland*.

Quite apart from its material, *The Land War in Ireland* is an impressive book. Written neither in the heat of battle nor as a counterblast to misrepresentations, it is not controversial in tone. With sufficient astringency to give it edge, it contains none of those outbursts of personal spleen which sometimes mar Blunt's Egyptian and Indian memoirs. Blunt seems to have gained a perspective on the actors, including himself, and the remote events of two decades before, that enabled him to write of them dispassionately. Even gruelling experiences, though not minimized, are lightened by the wit and humour with which they are touched.

## REHABILITATION

## I

HERETOFORE, though Blunt may have been politically anathema, he had remained on good terms with his world. But the culmination of his political excess in Ireland, the revelation of a private talk, whether justified or not, had broken a cardinal convention—the strict separation of private from public life. For this sin against their code some of his friends punished him during the following year by what amounted to ostracism.

Without doubt he had derived in the past a certain enjoyment from scoldings and snubbings—which is not to say that his political action was not born of profound conviction—but to lose caste with his peers offended his pride and vanity, and left him extremely lonely. There were many who were ready to praise him for his Irish adventure, eager to be associated with him, but the majority of these did not belong to his own set. And more than most men he was dependent upon friendship. Half unconsciously he devoted the next years, the last decade of the nineteenth century, to re-establishing his position. At the end, to his professed surprise he was ‘almost popular’.

Political activities, for the time being, were not practicable as a resource, although they were to become so again in a year or two, particularly in Egypt. Indeed, they had lost their savour through his sense of failure in ‘pleading the cause of the backward nations of the world’ and the knowledge that he was regarded as politically a beaten man. In 1888, too, ‘an unfortunate family quarrel’, the first of a long series, added to his bitterness in regard to the public situation.



The things I love have all grown wearisome;  
The things that loved me are estranged or dead.  
I have a house most fair, but tenanted  
With shadows only, gardens of tall trees,  
Fenced in and made secure from every dread  
But this one terror, my soul's lack of ease.  
I have much wealth of pleasure, horse and hound  
Woods broad for sport, and fields that are my own,  
With neighbours of good cheer to greet me round,  
And servants tried by whom my will is done.  
Here all things live at peace in this dear place  
All but my pride, which goes companionless.

The first summer after the Irish episode he spent in breeding Arab horses, in writing verse, and—as far as was possible when haunted by 'vain regrets and hopes made void'—in enjoying his 'physical life in the green Sussex woods as in former days'. In the autumn his thoughts turned with longing to his garden in Egypt—

There we may forget  
All but the presence of the blessed sun.  
There in our tents well-housed, sublimely set  
Under a pyramid, with horse and gun,  
We may make terms with nature and, awhile,  
Put as it were our souls to grass, and run  
Barefooted and barehearted in the smile  
Of that long summer which still girds the Nile.

The first step on the way was taken in November, to Paris, where through Lady Carlisle he had an interview, an account of which he published in *The Times*, with General Boulanger, whose integrity and ability impressed him. He made acquaintance with the Socialist Louise Michel who presented him with the manuscript of one of her poems and failed to see why he, who had been in prison in Ireland, was not eager to attend a Socialist meeting in Paris: 'Why should he hesitate',

she asked, 'there will be no danger, we shall all have revolvers?' 'I like the woman,' Blunt observed, 'as she is evidently honest and of an unselfish nature.'

From France he went with Lady Anne, *en route* to Alexandria, to pay a long-promised visit to her cousins, the Noels, in Greece. Since he had last been at Athens—as an attaché, thirty years before—the picturesqueness of King Otto's court and of unmodernized Athenian life had disappeared. Worse still, the splendid old Venetian walls of the Acropolis had been pulled down and the beauty of Mycenae had been destroyed by Schliemann's excavations. Blunt had no sympathy with reconstructing past ages, infinitely preferring monuments encrusted, however anomalously, by time. The wonders of the Corinthian canal and railway journeys instead of mountain rides hardly compensated for what was lost. Happily Nauplia, pale gold and pink on its bright blue bay, and the other villages where he was put up by Greek friends of the Noels, had been left untouched. Life in the small stucco houses beneath dilapidated trees continued as of old, leisurely and teeming. And Euboea itself, with the new generation of Noels, whom he had known as children in his attaché days, was much as it had been, with the added charm of remembered gaiety.

During his first months in Egypt Blunt refrained from meddling in any way in politics; he still felt under obligation to Lord Salisbury to avoid showing his sympathy with the Nationalists publicly, and he was quite content to occupy himself with his horses and the garden of Sheykh Obeyd.

In the early nineteenth century the garden had been purchased by the Viceroy Ibrahim from the Imam of his Arabian army. He enclosed thirty-three acres within walls, dug *sakiehs* to irrigate them and, having 'a passion for laying out gardens', planted them as they were to be found in Blunt's time. He had spared no expense. Trees had been brought from Taif in the Hejaz and from Syria whose fruit fetched a yearly revenue of £800. The pomegranates, so large that only thirty went to a camel load, were worthy of being sent

yearly from the Viceroy to the Sultan at Constantinople. Later, when Tewfik lived at Koumba during his father Ismail's reign, the ladies of his harem were carried each Friday to the garden to spend the day listening to its running waters and eating sweetmeats in its cool shade. The ruin of Ismail's fortune in 1879 put an end to all such pleasuring and the garden came into the hands of the Domains Commission from which Blunt had bought it.

But the garden suffered during the Nationalist uprising and again during Blunt's imprisonment in Ireland when the caretakers imagined that his career was over and they might treat the garden as their own, 'economizing the cost of its watering and using it as a run for their cattle'. To restore it was for Blunt a labour of love. In 1888, leaving his family at Cairo, he spent many weeks at Sheykh Obeyd pruning the trees with a pair of garden nippers and superintending work on the garden. It was seeded, dug twice and restocked with young orange plants; the irrigation engine was mended and watering begun regularly. Soon the place grew lush again and had a kempt air of remote and happy peace.

He arranged the house also, the old gardener's house of four rooms and an open selamlik as sitting-room. The floors were covered in the fashion of Nejd with two inches of clean white sand over which carpets were spread, and furniture—at first consisting only of a divan and a table made of square chicken-coops—was constructed by the village carpenter of palm branches newly cut from the garden. Blunt's own room was 'like a lantern with windows facing east, north and west', and from his bed he could see 'the first glimmer of false dawn' that made the owls hoot and the jackals cry.

At the beginning of the real dawn he rode outside the wall to the desert's edge to await the sunrise and watch the animals and birds. He gave orders, always strictly kept, that all animals, even wolves, should be unmolested within the garden.<sup>1</sup> The foxes soon became so tame that they came sometimes within a few yards of his feet, playing and rolling over each other,



LADY ANNE BLUNT



unafraid since he wore Arab dress like the workpeople to whom they were used. And the trees were full of birds. It was a wrench, as it always proved to be, to leave in the spring soon after the Mowled of Sheykh Obeid, the annual religious festival when a calf for the labourers and a sheep for the sheykh were killed, and games and recitations and chantings were held in honour of the birthday of the Saint, at his tomb in the garden.

On his return to England Blunt's re-establishment in society began chiefly by way of literary work. He started the long poem, 'the Wisdom of Merlyn', a 'book of maxims', on which he laboured intermittently for many years though he did not print it until 1914. He wrote two pastoral poems, 'Worth Forest' in rhymed couplets incorporating bits of verse done as early as 1865, and '*Sed Nos Qui Vivimus*', which, like the four poems 'From the Arabic' that were composed at this time, is an experiment in assonance. These he published in 1889 together with the sonnet sequence, 'A New Pilgrimage' and several fairly long poems written earlier, during his 'Proteus period'. 'A New Pilgrimage' recounts his journey in 1886-7 through France and Switzerland to Rome, and gives its title to the volume.<sup>2</sup>

As poetry the book is impressive only for its facility and the care with which the theories put forward in the Preface in regard to the sonnet form are observed. But it has a certain importance because of the impression it conveys of Blunt's zest for life.

I love things that are young and happy and eternal,  
Eternal in their change and growth as I too changing grow.  
Old am I, and how many voices that I loved are heard not!  
Yet the world lives, and in its life I live and laugh and  
love.

The variety of experience recorded in the volume is astonishing. He wrote with keen enjoyment of trout fishing, of fox-hunting and partridge-shooting, of a day of tennis at Hampton

Court, of watching 'the worshippers at fashion's shrine' in London in the month of May. He

would not for a million not have seen  
Fred Archer finish upon Guinevere.

He cherished recollections of gambling at Monaco; of the rapture of lying again in 'a Christian bed' after the journey across the Pampas; of

the unlimited fields revealed of grey Arabian desert,  
Where are no streams or shade, but only the blind haze  
of noon;

of an Indian city, 'strange, wonderful and vast'. Almost every aspect of nature intrigued him—perhaps in part because he read into nature an ironic spirit which baffled while it delighted him:

Earth has a silent mockery which repels our questioning.  
Most characteristic of all is his love for his own land,

How dare I not rejoice who thus its king in Eden reign?

He liked to count the generations who had built up his estates—'the Sussex clod', 'worthy master Gale, our house's founder', and those that followed.

That which they did I do. In me they live unvan-  
quished.

My voice is theirs to-day, my step their step, my soul  
their soul.

For them I live ungrieving, and ungrieved their fruit I  
gather

From trees they planted bravely in their pride of life and  
time.

They fashioned these old gardens. Let my soul their  
joy inherit,

Their passion heaped on passion, life on life, for my  
life's prize.

'Worth Forest', in which he dwells fondly on each feature of his countryside, expresses his bitterness for the loss of the son who would have carried on 'the guardianship of this domain'.

Blunt was at last ready to admit himself a poet. He had come to feel it not merely one of the accomplishments of a gentleman but a serious occupation to write the 'tale of transient things' his eyes had seen, his ears had heard. He would carve his thought,

clean cut and plain of meaning,  
Marble made life, with sinewy phrase and knotted  
argument.

For he had grown to believe that he would be 'a traitor' if he let these things vanish unrecorded.

An influence in turning him at this time to poetry was his friendship with William Morris, his first intimate acquaintance with a member of a professedly literary or artistic group. He had known Mrs. Morris for some years but not until he paid a visit to Kelmscott Manor in 1889 did he and Morris become friends, drawn together because, as Blunt put it, they had both sacrificed much socially to their principles, their principles had failed to justify themselves by results and they were both 'driven back on earlier loves, art, poetry, romance'. Morris's independence, his success in establishing a way of life perfectly satisfactory to himself, his absorption in his work and his mastery of multifarious crafts, were titles to Blunt's admiration. He felt, unconsciously perhaps, something of the condescension of the man of the world for the professional; nevertheless, he was profoundly interested in discussing matters literary and artistic and political with a man who knew whereof he spoke. He felt too, that he understood how to talk with Morris, that he was able to give him information and to draw him out to express his own views. He liked what he called Morris's 'impersonality', the fact that he was no respecter of persons. It was pleasant to have him



shout peremptorily, 'Damn it, Blunt, take an oar', while they were fishing together for gudgeon in the Thames. Whatever Morris's feeling towards him may have been—and Blunt knew that he really cared only for a few lifelong friends—Blunt looked upon Morris with both affection and admiration, doing all he could to cheer him through his final illness in 1896 and, for his sake as well as hers, showing much kindness to Mrs. Morris and her younger daughter after his death.

By 1889, Blunt's daughter, Judith, later Lady Wentworth, was emerging from childhood and was to be launched in society. The fact that they were in many ways alike temperamentally, as well as in appearance, formed a bond of personal devotion which made their estrangement, when it came a few years afterwards, all the more bitter. Blunt spoke prophetically when he wrote in the last stanza 'To Hester on The Stair':

Be it so. My love you mock it,  
And my sighs are empty wind.  
See, I shut my heart and lock it  
From your laughing eyes unkind.  
Yet, remember this last word  
Love is two-edged like a sword.  
Mind this only, only mind!

Not long before, he had remarked to a friend: 'You don't know what it is to be the father of an only daughter, so you will not understand how I am wrapped up in the child. She is the only person I feel afraid of, and I suppose that is the reason.' And although he did not attend many of her balls and parties, the process of her début provided him with a new absorbing interest and the brilliance of her beauty and wit gave him deep satisfaction.

Nevertheless the old desire to be off to Egypt came upon him as it did each autumn. Happily at Cairo he found that time had softened the antipathy of Government officials there towards him. Prince Wagram, who had followed the Blunts to Egypt in December, brought an informal message to him

to the effect that Baring would like to see him, and he was advised by his native friends that a *rapprochement* would strengthen his opportunities of influence by removing people's fear in calling on him of the Resident's displeasure.

The interview was a successful opening for future association and marked, as Blunt himself noted, a definite, if temporary, softening in his attitude towards Baring and the British Occupation. Although he could make no headway on the subject of Arabi's recall to Egypt—most of the exiles had been permitted to return—he was able to discuss with the Resident, as he continued to do with good effect for the next ten years or so, many questions of immediate practical interest.

Blunt's heated partisanship had cooled and he took Egyptian politics less personally: 'For the first time in my life, I think, this winter I have been absolutely and entirely happy. The feeling that I have finished with the vain European life of fret and worry never leaves me and is like the dressing-gown and slippers one puts on after a day's hunting and finds the best part of the sport. I have come exactly to the point where I was ten years ago when the East was a romance to me and not a "sphere of influence", and I am able to enjoy it better now, having ransacked the other treasures of life.'

The story was much the same in England in the spring. His political sins had faded from the minds of his friends; time and the turn of events had assuaged their outraged feelings. He was, after all, a most fascinating member of their own set, whose escapades might be overlooked since displeasure with their more eccentric manifestations had been duly registered. So they began to return to him—Lytton, first, and his cousin George Wyndham, who had written him friendly letters the previous winter. Wyndham strove to make things pleasant for him, arranging meetings at his house in Park Lane with their common friends, and eventually, even one with Arthur Balfour. It considerably restored Blunt's confidence, in view of the difficulties over prison garb, to lend Balfour on a chilly evening his own topcoat.

To his women friends Blunt found that his prison adventures had become a title to romantic interest, which made it easy for him to resume his place in society. Blunt's relations with women form the background of his life from first to last and for obvious reasons were highly important to him during this period of rehabilitation. He was fastidious and not exceptionally passionate, but love affairs were part of the social game in which his charm and good looks gave him the advantage. Victory won, his vanity was satisfied and lasting friendship was often the result.

The two summers after their *rapprochement* he spent chiefly with Lytton at the Embassy in Paris, the scene of so much of his diplomatic youth in the days of Lord Cowley and the Second Empire. They talked of literature, 'more especially of dramatic literature', with which Lytton just then was occupied; and Lytton, older than Blunt by nine years and 'already entering that valley of the shadow of old age from which he was never to emerge' confided his sorrows to Blunt. The summer of 1890 would have been one of the most delightful in Blunt's experience had it not been darkened by the death of his cousin 'Bitters', Francis Currie, the mentor of his youth at Paris and his constant friend.

The next year Lytton himself became desperately ill. When Blunt was taken into the room where he lay in bed to say good-bye before going south to Egypt in mid-November, 1891, he knew that the farewell might be their last. A few weeks later a telegram reached him at Fogliano saying that his friend had died. 'His death', wrote Blunt long afterwards, 'was a loss I can hardly estimate, and to many more than me, for by the public in Paris it was looked on as a State calamity. . . . It was not merely that Lytton was popular, but he was beloved.' In April Blunt paid his public tribute to their friendship in an article in the *Nineteenth Century*, 'Lord Lytton's Rank in Literature', that gave incidentally his reminiscences of their first meeting and their months together at Cintra.

## 2

Outwardly Blunt's life for the next six years runs as usual, the winters in Egypt and the summers in England. But beneath the surface of his social relations new depths are discernible—more conscious stress is laid upon friendship. Now that his intimate circle had been shattered by the death of two lifelong friends, probably without fully realizing it he set about welding more firmly other relationships which had been re-established during the past two years. He well understood their value.

Love seeks its price, but friendship has a fashion  
Larger to give, and of less selfish plan.

No one had to a greater degree the gifts that make old friends seek one out; but also no one took more assiduous pains than he to keep up with friends. When he was an old man, he wrote, 'experience all is of use, save one, to have angered a friend'.

Every August he went on a driving tour partly for the fun of the driving and sightseeing, but chiefly for the sake of looking up his friends. He drove his Arabs swiftly across the Berkshire Downs to visit Morris at Kelmscott Manor, travelling over grass through 'a quite uninhabited country as desolate as parts of Mesopotamia, and in the bright sunlight very beautiful, coveys of young partridges running here and there tamely in front of the carriage'. Then on to his cousins the Elchos at Stanway where he had an agreeable time with his fellow guest, Arthur Balfour.

Or he drove his cousin Lord Alfred Douglas to Stratford and continued alone again to Kelmscott where he tried unavailingly to prove to Morris 'that he and Ruskin had done more harm than good by their attempt to make English people love beauty and decorate their architecture'. On to Stonehenge, about which he wrote: I went at midnight 'in full

solitude to the stones and spent an hour there alone, making incantations in the hope of raising some ghost of ancient times, but in vain, and though I repeated the Lord's Prayer backwards, nothing would come. Perhaps it was the fact that in order to do so without a book I had first to repeat each sentence in its natural sequence, and this may have neutralized the spell. Then I lay down under one of the fallen blocks and dozed off for an hour or two, but still nothing. Stonehenge has much in common with primitive Egypt.' Finally he drove homewards by way of Twyford on the Itchen, the scene of his early but unforgotten sufferings.

Three years later he passed Stonehenge again, on the way to the West of England and South Wales. This time he stopped at Wilton where he found Sidney Herbert, later Lord Pembroke, with his family of boys at cricket, much as he had found former generations, thirty years before: 'Wilton', he said, 'is the paradise of England with its three rivers, eternally beautiful and unchanged while its owners change and perish. One passes by and finds Herberts living there, happily idling their lives away, as one finds swallows year after year nesting in a village, and one imagines them to be the same Herberts, as one imagines the others to be the same swallows.'

In 1896 he stopped the first few nights of his tour at Oldhouse in the New Forest with Auberon Herbert who, grown more beautiful and more ethereal, but also 'more flighty than he used to be', was living a vegetarian life beset by draughts. Then on to his friends the Horners at Mells, 'a comfortable eighteenth-century house, remote and shut in, which gives a sense of immemorial quiet screened from the world's view'.

A few weeks after the annual driving tour Blunt sometimes made a series of family visits to Scotland, stopping on the way southward with the Tennants at The Glen; or he went for a fortnight's grouse shooting at Castle Menzies with the Wagrams. There he made friends with the Austrian Count Mensdorff

and with the Comte and Comtesse de Paris and the French Royalists—the Broglies, the Jancourts, the Hautpouls—who were paying court to the ‘worthy Pretenders’. His friendship with ‘the flower of their wilderness’, the Princess Hélène de France et de Navarre, for whom he wove ‘Anthems of grief and true love born of thy loveliness’, outlasted many years. She was ‘a tall, very tall, slight girl of immense charm and distinction, whom’, Blunt wrote, ‘I taught to play lawn tennis at Castle Menzies, three years ago. She remembered it well and was very nice to me in her greeting.’ During a fortnight there in 1891 he saw the Pretenders several times, at a great *chasse* of blue hares on Shehallion and when they came again to Castle Menzies, ‘the little Princess looking lovely in a hat with pink flowers’.

He paid an annual visit, too, to Prince and Princess Wagram at Gros Bois, near Paris, with days of shooting or expeditions—to Ferrières and to Vaux-le-Vicomte—and evenings of good talk and political discussion. Gros Bois itself, a royal domain, had been an oak wood ever since the time of the Druids and had been given repeatedly to different favourites of the Kings of France until it was bestowed by Napoleon on Wagram’s grandfather. The way of life there appealed to Blunt and to some extent he carried it out on his own estates. In his diary he wrote, ‘He [Wagram] remembers three poachers having been shot dead at various times in the park, two by himself and one by the keepers. In his own case the man had first fired on him. In the third case the poacher was unarmed; in none was any inquiry made. He and the keepers buried the dead men quietly where they fell. The last of these three events happened as long ago as 1863 and “Nobody”, he said, “knows now where they lie but myself; the keepers who helped to bury them are all dead; it has kept poachers most effectually away. *En plaine*, meaning the open fields, one does not make justice thus to oneself, but inside the park it is best to do so and say nothing.” Wagram is a fine survival of the old sporting days in France, against which the revolution

declaimed. . . . What is pleasant in the sport here is Wagram's familiar way with his men; they are all devoted to him.'

Oddly enough out of this patriarchal world came, later, Blunt's first taste of motoring—a drive with the Princess Wagram from Gros Bois to Paris at the exhilarating speed of fifteen miles an hour. In England, where the roads were narrow and winding, motors found no favour in his eyes. They killed the quiet and fragrance and were likely to kill the inhabitants of the Sussex countryside. He patronized them only of necessity, his one long drive being many years later after a serious illness when, too desperate to protest, he was whisked from Newbuildings to Brighton by his son-in-law. On more than one occasion he derived considerable pleasure from the undoubted frenzy of the motorist whom he held up, choked with dust, behind the impassable back of his carriage as he walked his horses with deliberate slowness down a Sussex lane.

During the year of his first motor drive, 1900, the great International Exposition was being held at Paris. In the Victorian Gothic Country House containing the English exhibit, hung, among others, the tapestry after Botticelli's 'Spring' made for Blunt by Morris in 1895-6, and in the Horse Show at Vincennes Blunt exhibited a number of Arabs. But the tapestry did not show to advantage since the English pavilion, in common with most of the *pavillons Etrangers*, had 'a certain vulgarity' about it; and, although the Crabbet horses attracted 'many admirers of a serious kind' and took four medals and prizes, they did not take the higher prizes that they should justly have won.

The autumn trip to Egypt afforded him excuse for journeys to more distant friends. He made a great half-circle in 1895 to visit at Therapia his cousin Philip Currie, ambassador to the Porte, and, on the way, his old friend Count Joseph Potocki at Antonine in Poland to see his Arab stud. Thence to Countess Branicka's country house, Alexandrie, at Biela-

Tzerkov in the Ukraine, where life, seemly, hierarchial, full of gusto, was again of the sort to give him pleasure.

Another autumn, Blunt went on from Gros Bois, *en route* to Egypt, to pay a long-planned visit in Tunis to his cousin Terence Bourke, a younger brother of his old ally, 'Button'. Blunt was delighted with his cousin's house in the Moslem quarter, 'as lovely an old tile-encrusted bit of *bric-à-brac* as one would wish to live in'. But he was disconcerted to find that his Arabic was not understood by the Tunisians and that he was obliged to depend on his cousin for the commonest words in the Tunisian dialect. Fortunately Terence Bourke not only talked Tunisian Arabic perfectly but had acquired, Blunt found, an influence with the native Tunisians of all classes, unrivalled by any other European. He had many ideas, too, on Oriental subjects and on religion that were sympathetic to his cousin. They made a plan of going to the oasis of Siwah in the spring, of visiting the Senussi, a Mohammedan sect whose headquarters were in the Tripolitan desert, and, perhaps, making profession of Islam there. 'I hope', wrote Blunt, 'I may sometime do so—I think a hermitage of the kind I have been seeking might be found in the country near Cyrene.'

Meantime they started off in a landau with four horses abreast for Kerouan, the Holy City of Tunisia. There the cousins, in Arabian dress, passed for an Indian Moslem merchant and his friend, a Syrian, from Damascus. The heat was terrific so that they lay all day 'stewing in the balcony' playing chess. But in the evening and early morning they sallied forth. No one suspected them of a disguise. They were able to enter the mosques and, in those outside the town, make their devotions, and in the evening to sit on mats under the city walls by an Arab coffee house, drinking lemonade. A day and a half, and they had had enough of Kerouan. They left by the Eastern gate to take their places in the horse-drawn train that galloped across the desolate plains in four hours to the sea at Sus. There they parted, each taking ship, Terence

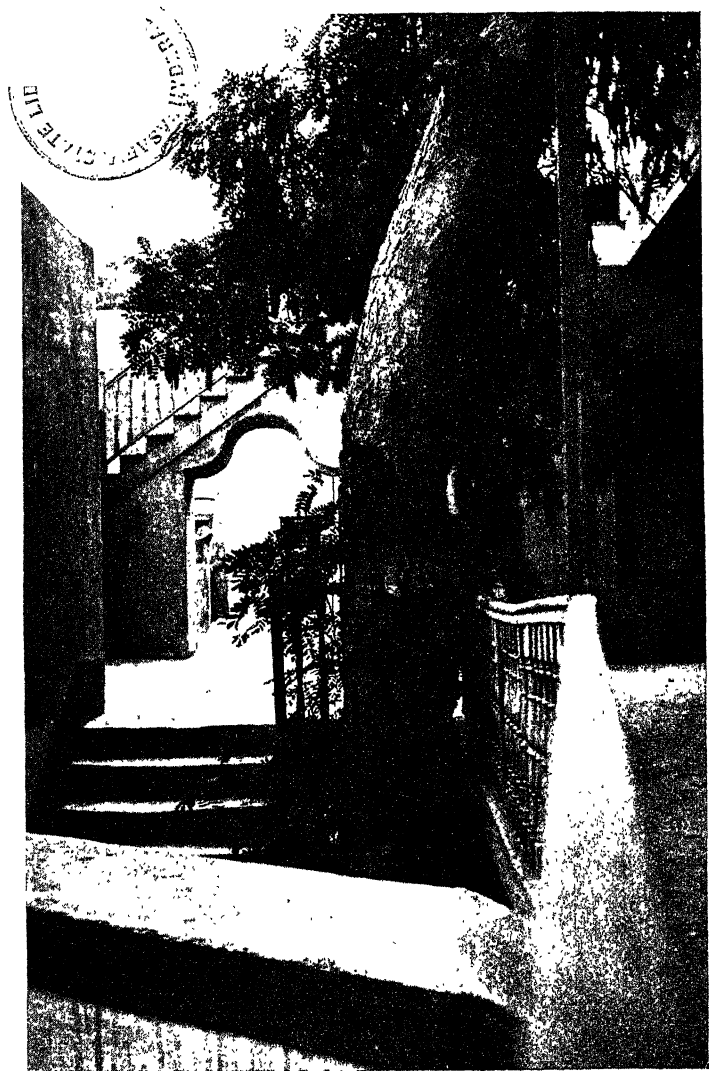


Bourke to return to Tunis, Blunt by way of Tripoli and Malta to Egypt.

At one time or another most of Blunt's friends came out to Egypt and were hospitably entertained at the larger house—like most Egyptian houses of mud with a coat of plaster on the outside—which had been built at Sheykh Obeyd by local workmen around a great lebbak tree. People still speak of the delight of entering the sweet-scented coolness of the garden, from the brilliant sun of the desert outside, and of sitting on the roof of the house in the shade of thick branches, talking with their host.

Visitors gathered there from the out-of-the-way places as well as the centres of the world: sheykhs from Syria and Nejd, Egyptian sheykhs and fellahin, French and English officials and winter tourists in Cairo. Blunt discussed problems of all sorts with them, parried such searching questions concerning his political doings as 'why do you take pleasure in making your fellow men unhappy', restrained the rash, urged the dilatory to action, and advised or helped actively those who needed aid. And little as he himself cared for monuments of ancient civilizations he knew a great deal about them and saw to it that his European friends visiting Egypt were properly introduced to its great treasures.

The letters of Frederic Harrison from Sheykh Obeyd in 1895 to his family in England picture vividly the life there. Of his arrival he wrote: 'I found our Sheykh's name a passport everywhere. When I got to the station out of Cairo and asked for a ticket for Ezbet-el-Nakle, their black faces shone and their white teeth came out and they said, "Blunt?" and when I nodded they seemed ready to carry me there. . . . At Nakle I found a Nubian, in fez and blue pants, with a white (royal) donkey, richly caparisoned with tassels and embroideries. I solemnly mounted the donkey, the Nubian in front, and a tribe of Arab boys running behind with my bags. We passed through a grove of palms, under which a score of Arab mares were tethered, and at the rude stone



SHEYKH OBEYD  
The House around the Lebbak Tree



outer gate the Nubian janissary said to me, "El Sheykh!" And there, sure enough, was Wilfrid, in an immense white *burnous*, white baggy trousers, and an Arab—not Turkish—white headdress and lapels—like the Sultan of Morocco. I said, "Allah! Bismallah! Sheykh!" and rode in. I was taken up a stone staircase without banister or handrail on to the roof, shaded with lebbak trees and sycamores, and there, lounging on a collection of cane divans, *chaises longues*, and settees, we had hot fresh milk, and tea and dates.

'The ladies adopt the Arab dress, and go about in long flowing *burnouses* and oriental headdresses worn over embroidered satin, looking like Roxana and Fatima. Everything is carried on in Arab style.' The scene seemed to Harrison 'like a bit of *Genesis* in real life'. Arab brood mares—lovely Arabs of grey or black or bay—and their foals were tethered, feeding down the clover, in front of the gate and outer court and were tended by a small tribe of Bedouin lads who lived in tents under the palms. In tents behind the house lived the house servants and in the garden the Arab gardeners and water-carriers; five hundred yards off was a teeming Bedouin village and still farther out, in the actual desert, was the camel encampment with its tribe of Bedouin. 'Altogether', wrote Harrison, 'there must be at least a hundred Arabs under the paternal rule of our Sheykh.'

'This morning we mounted—Wilfrid looking very grand in his *burnous* and turban on a fine bay. I had a dapple grey with cocked-up tail and oriental saddle and tassels for trappings; Lord E—on a white and very quick donkey—with bare-leg seyces or runners on foot behind. We rode across desert, water-courses, meadows, and queer tracks to Heliopolis, the Egyptian *On*.'

In his next letter he tells of a desert trip. The Blunts often took their guests excursions into the desert, sometimes short jaunts to lunch or tea under a gay tent prepared for them by their servants in some seemingly remote desert valley, sometimes longer trips such as the journey on camels in 1894

into the Western desert where they travelled 'among the then isolated monasteries of the Natron Valley, and in the great uninhabited wilderness beyond it.'

I went with happy heart (how happy!) a while since  
    Behind my camel flocks,  
Piping all day where the Nile pastures end  
    And the white sand begins  
        Among the rocks.  
The wheeling eagles mocked me high there from the skies,  
    The red blast of the desert wind  
        Hath seared my eyes.

During his summers in England, also, Blunt received innumerable visitors at Crabbet; among the most frequent, Wilfrid Meynell, then editor of the Catholic paper, *Merrie England*, who brought literary gossip, long accounts of Francis Thompson, of Cardinal Manning's last days, and 'of a new movement within the body of the English Catholic clergy, of the most revolutionary kind especially among the Capuchins'—the modernist movement. But gradually Blunt began to feel that he was overhoused at Crabbet, and to pine for something new. In 1895, letting Crabbet for some years, he moved towards the end of June to the comparatively small house, Newbuildings Place.

The house itself, small, irregular, aristocratic, of grey Sussex stone, its colour softened by age, had at once an air of dignity and of gracious homeliness that satisfied Blunt's taste. On a hilltop it dominated the woods, criss-crossed with deeply shaded rides, the farms, and the rugged oak-bordered fields and hedged meadows of the estate. Far beyond, across the weald, could be seen the long blue line of the Sussex Downs with the dark jut that marked Chanctonbury Ring.<sup>3</sup> The place had an intimate charm: civilized and quiet, it was yet wild and uncultivated; and though small, seemed spacious.

Blunt thought it a delicious sort of hermitage where one could forget the 'worries of the world', where the stone

floored, panelled rooms, the plain oak stair with its barred gate at the landing, the priests' secret hiding-places by the end chimneys, recalled the austere, partisan, traditional life of past centuries; and where the woods, he wrote, are 'lovely in green and gold, nightingales singing night and day from every hedge, quite a dozen close to the house so that one can hear them at any hour of the night chorusing when one opens a window.' His diary is jotted with this fresh pleasure in all the sights and sounds of the place: in the bees and the butterflies floating intently above the attar roses brought from Damascus and the familiar English flowers between box-edged paths; in the yew hedge that separated the house from the orchard and the weald; in the peacocks stepping about arrogantly in the sunlight; most of all in the Arab mares in their near-by paddock.

Two years after, in the year of the Queen's Jubilee, he found it necessary to enlarge the house, and erected what was known as 'the Jubilee Room', a two-storied building, separated a little from the main house and used chiefly for guests. Though—or perhaps because—it was built by a local bricklayer who worked out the plans with Blunt step by step as the building progressed, it toned with the old house, softening its distinct, Jacobean outline and giving it a spreading, settled air.

Almost the highest praise that Blunt could give to a place was that it seemed to him worthy of being the last scene he looked upon with mortal eyes. And when he had first seen it, long before 1895, he had remarked of Newbuildings, 'it is a place to die in'. He was in truth to die there years later. Meantime he found it a place well worth living in.

## 3

For many summers previously a group of congenial spirits known as the Crabbet Club paid Blunt a yearly visit. The club started as a branch of the Wilton or Waggoner Club which Lord

Pembroke had founded in 1871 to bring his Eton and Oxford friends together at Wilton for cricketing, boating, lawn tennis and other diversions. Lord Pembroke Blunt had known since his schooldays and in 1876 he and several members of the Waggon Club stayed at Crabbet. They had a cricket match and a lawn tennis handicap and Blunt 'drove them all to Epsom for the Derby [Silvio's year]'. The party proved such a success that Blunt, though ten years older than the other members, was asked to join the Club and the next year one of its regular meetings took place at Crabbet as it did annually thereafter.<sup>4</sup>

Though politics were not in question nearly all of the members were Tories and highly disapproved of Blunt's political doings. From the time of his support of Egypt in 1882 through his contest for a seat in Parliament as a Home Ruler in 1885-6, the Crabbet meetings became increasingly less popular until they were all but submerged by the Irish episode in 1887. Blunt felt it natural enough that hardly any of the old Wilton members answered his invitations and he set about reconstructing the club on different lines with the three members of the old group who remained faithful—Mark Napier, Eddy Hamilton and Nigel Kingscote—and a few younger men to fill in. Later some of the older members such as Godfrey Webb returned to the fold.

Under Blunt's presidency the Crabbet Club now entered its brilliant and famous second incarnation. It took a more intellectual turn, adding competitions in mock oratory and extempore verses to the lawn tennis handicap. The members drew up at the meeting in 1887 a constitution of fourteen articles. 'The club', it announced, 'is a convivial association, which has for its object to discourage serious views of life by holding up a constant standard of amusements.' The members were expected to subordinate the interests of public life 'to the higher interests of the club'. Anyone so misguided as to accept a seat in the Cabinet, the Viceroyalty of India, an Archbishopric, or an Embassy 'must submit to re-election

before he can resume the privileges of membership'. And anyone who married would be suspended for twelve calendar months, since marriage, though not discountenanced, was held to be a grave danger. Ladies, of course, were ineligible for membership.

George Wyndham, who became a member in 1889, put new life into the club by introducing his own young friends. Among them, Blunt wrote, 'were George Curzon (afterwards Lord Curzon of Kedleston), Harry Cust, Houghton (now Lord Crewe), Frederick Locker, Umphreville Swinburne, cousin of the poet, St. George Lane Fox, Eddy Tennant, Laurence Currie, George Leveson Gower, Esmé Howard, Elcho, Dick Grosvenor, Alfred Douglas, Charles Gatty, Morpeth, and his brother Hubert Howard, and on a single occasion Oscar Wilde.' George Wyndham described the meetings to Charles Gatty: 'The occasion is a man's party, barring the hostess, Lady Anne Blunt: they meet to play lawn tennis, the piano, the fool, and other instruments of gaiety. To write *bouts rimés*, sonnets, and make sham orations. . . . You will find young Radicals and Tories, amateurs of poetry and manly sports. The president presides at dinner in the costume of an Arab Sheykh, and produces sonnets and shrewd observations on man and nature. The woods grow up in virginal unconsciousness of the axe to the very door. On one side a wilderness sown with desert plants and dotted with wind-sown English bushes; on the other a Sussex paddock with Arab brood-mares and their foals. Below in the hollow a pond full of trout, on which the swans sleep and swim lazily through the day. The house is overgrown with June roses and the lawns after dark are very silent and conducive to the complete and satisfactory solution of all problems, moral and æsthetic, by the active brains of young and uninstructed men pacing in the moonlight.'

Long afterwards Esmé Howard, now Lord Howard of Penrith, wrote of Mark Napier's proposing him for member-



ship at one of the Saturday evening dinners: 'I hardly know this fellow, Esmé Howard, whom I have been told to propose, and it matters little to me whether one fool more or less joins this club, but there is one matter which may be of great importance to you all. It is that I have, in Westminster, a charming little house that I want to let.' Esmé Howard then threw himself on the mercy of the company as a Respectable Mediocrity. Whereupon George Curzon protested, 'in a voice trembling with indignation', 'We have had, hitherto, all sorts of people elected to the club, of whom the less said, perhaps, the better. But we have never yet had one who laid claim to the title of Respectable Mediocrity. A Mediocrity I might, perhaps, *à la rigueur* have put up with, but a *respectable* one would be past endurance.'

On Sunday afternoon the tennis was played off and in the evening the poems were read and more speeches made. The company sat at table sometimes through the night and refreshed themselves in the early June sunshine of the next morning by a plunge in the lake before returning to London. It was all carefree and uproarious. 'These occasions are the salt of life', pronounced Blunt. 'The poetry of the Crabbet Club', he added, 'has been preserved in print, and is one of the curiosities of literature, deserving a place, I venture to think, in company with the best verse of a not serious kind, including even perhaps that of the Mermaid Tavern.' His own enjoyment of the fun may have prejudiced him in favour of poems distinguished chiefly for their high spirit and gentlemanly facility. The wittiest of them is Curzon's 'Sin' which took the prize in 1893 and ends,

And so when some historian  
Of the period Victorian  
Shall crown the greatest exploit of this wonder-working age,  
His eye shall light on Crabbet,  
And, if truth shall be his habit,  
The name of everyone of us will shine upon that page.

To us will be the glory  
That ne'er shall fade in story,  
Of reviving the old axiom that all the world's akin,  
That the true link of union  
Which holds men in communion  
Is frank and systematic and premeditated Sin!

George Wyndham's more ambitious prize poem of 1890, 'A Metaphisico-Pastoral Poem', 'In Praise of Crabbet and the Free Fellowship of the Crabbet Club' has grace and a wistful charm. Two stanzas of it run,

Flight and Pursuit, this is the ceaseless round  
For all who cumber life with end or aim.  
Life full enough of pleasure may be found,  
They have no need to complicate the game  
With arbitrary rules of Right and Wrong,  
Wisdom and Folly, all unworthy song.  
Unworthy song, nor worth a passing thought,  
Since Life alone sufficient is for theme;  
Mere life—the unexplained sensations brought  
By winds that blow from field and wood and  
stream,  
The warmth of sunlight, the kind talk of  
friends,  
This is a life that needs no aims and ends.

The young men of the Crabbet Club did not confine their visits to Blunt merely to its meetings. Lord Howard tells of another visit to Crabbet on Derby Day in the early 'nineties when a characteristic episode occurred. Blunt drove his guests as usual in a brake with a four-in-hand of Arab horses to Epsom where a place was always reserved for him inside the ring. They arrived rather late, just before a race, to find the entrance to the course, which they had to cross in order to reach the ring, blocked by the police. 'With his usual utter disregard of law, Wilfrid whipped up his horses and charged

straight at the police who fortunately gave way. He tried to cross, but found that the usual opening on the other side was too compactly blocked by crowds even for him, and therefore swished his team round and started galloping up the course. For a few minutes we were the centre of all attraction, cheers, hoots and catcalls mingling in a strange symphony. The police however were, as usual, alive to the necessities of the moment and a little way farther up they cleared a space where there was an entrance on the inner side. This Wilfrid's quick eye detected and he again swished his team around to the left and galloped his horses triumphantly to the place reserved for him'.

Akin to the Crabbet Club were the more elusive 'Souls', a number of clever men and pretty women bent on pleasure, 'but pleasure of a superior kind'. The 'vulgarity of racing and card playing indulged in by the majority of the rich and noble' bored them. They were unconventional and looked for their amusements in intellectual diversions and 'for their excitement in romance and sentiment'.

Who precisely was a Soul and who not is doubtful. Souls occasionally reverted to the state of 'Bodies', the nickname given by the elect to the outer circle who had dubbed them Souls. However fluctuating, the set was in its day a brilliant cynosure and survives in *fin-de-siècle* memoirs. Certain members of the Crabbet Club belonged to it and Blunt himself, if not of the inmost circle, frequented it. His diaries of the time record gay parties of the Souls and of dinners given at his rooms in Mount Street 'which were for the moment rather the fashion with the Soul Society'.

## 4

Blunt's literary interests were stimulated by the intellectual bent of the Souls and the Crabbet Club, and especially by George Wyndham, a critic and poet of delicate sensibility on his own account. Like Blunt in many ways, Wyndham was

sufficiently unlike him both in character and point of view to be an ideally interesting companion. He lacked Blunt's depth and the strain of unsatisfied melancholy that was the result perhaps of moral strength and knowledge of a wider world than his. Twenty-three years younger, brilliant, handsome, full of charm and *bonhomie*, enthusiastic but far more conventional than Blunt, he held an assured position in the cleverest English society of the day and in public life. Not least important to Blunt, he was connected with him by the tie of blood. And it is hardly necessary to point out that Blunt, with his gifts, his experience, and his quick sympathetic affection, must have fascinated Wyndham as few other men could have done. Wyndham profoundly admired him as a poet—'your poetry touched me first', he wrote, 'when I was very young and turned me into what I am. But, reading it again, I receive two vivid impressions: that you are a poet, without any shadow of doubt, destined to great praise in years still long distant; and, again, that the stuff of your poetry is linked very closely with my life'. With Blunt's political opinions, of course, he rarely agreed, but the difference became merely an added spice to their friendship.

The cousins made a two days' literary pilgrimage to Stratford-on-Avon. In the evenings they read aloud 'Venus and Adonis' and 'Lucrece', two pieces which Blunt had 'always admired', thinking them 'the most elaborate and sustained of their kind, and splendidly rhetorical'—though their kind pleased him less than Chaucer's narrative poems in which he 'always found something wise and witty and unexpected to carry one along at however slow a pace' and which had a brilliance, given by the rhymes, surpassing that of all other verse. During the day they did the sights, and drove round the country with a jibbing horse. 'George', wrote Blunt, 'is a capital companion for a visit of this kind, as he enjoys sight-seeing, and besides knows all about Shakespeare, and has his theories about everything'. Blunt, too, if he had not theories about everything had many about Shakespeare as a man and

about his plays. His impression of the poet as 'a strong practical man, not over-refined, one who at the present day would have been a successful journalist and man of letters', he turned into a sonnet written for the Shakespeare Tercentenary celebration in 1916. He thought the plays should be read, not seen. *Othello* acted by Salvini, in Italian was the only Shakespearean play that on the stage had ever given him a real rush of emotion.

When George Wyndham, at the height of his literary activity, became editor of the *New Review* in 1896, he asked Blunt to write for him on Arabian subjects. Blunt responded with an article on the 'Moallakat' or the 'Poetry of the Ignorance' including a translation of Antar's Ode, and an article on the 'Origin of the Arabian Horse', for the June and July numbers of the journal. The first article, in particular, interested Wyndham greatly, putting him 'upon the track of discovery as to certain features of chivalry in the Middle Ages in Europe, a subject not yet properly traced to its origin in Arabia'.

Many of Blunt's other non-political writings at this time were concerned with literary criticism, and many with the Arab horse, part of an extensive study on which he worked for the rest of his life, although he never finished it.<sup>5</sup>

His memoirs were another task which employed him intermittently from now on. In the loneliness that followed on the Irish adventure and the death of Lytton and Francis Currie he had begun to read over old diaries, feeling perhaps that a period in his life, the active period, was definitely over. Looking back he recognized the importance of the entries concerning public events, and became deeply interested in his own history.

I will sit down awhile in dalliance  
With my dead life, and dream that it is young.

He had started the diaries in 1866 when he first read Rousseau's *Confessions* and determined then and there to write his

own—‘and at the same time to have a more satisfactory life to make record of’. It was no easy matter, a quarter of a century later, to amplify and clarify where necessary and to add the history of his early childhood in order to make a readable, consecutive story. His labours resulted in the many volumes of memoirs entitled ‘The Alms to Oblivion’ which are locked now in a black tin box at the Fitzwilliam Museum, by order of his will not to be opened until thirty years after his death. From those private folios he culled the published memoirs that make up his ‘Secret History Series’ upon which he worked as a running accompaniment to his other activities until his death.

More important to Blunt as a literary figure is the fact that the ‘nineties were among the years in his life most prolific of poetry. In 1892 he published his versified and revised version of Lady Anne’s translation of an Arabian epic of the tenth century, *The Stealing of the Mare*.<sup>6</sup> It describes with Arabian redundancy the customs and superstitions, fights, and feasts of the Bedouin:

And they brought the fruits and the meats, and dishes meet  
for Princes.

And when the meal was done then poured they fair pota-  
tions,

Drinking in jewelled cups with skilled musicians and  
singers,

(Where should the like be found?) for they sang in such  
sweet measure

That, if a bird had heard, it had stooped from its way in  
heaven.

In figure and trope they sang, of four-and-twenty stanzas.

In contrast, the simplicity of single lines produces an effect of plaintive beauty—

And I sat alone with myself in the empty breadth of the  
desert—

He finished in the following year, that 'idle story with an idle moral', *Griselda*, a society novel in rhymed verse that is remarkably good reading. Written in the tradition of Byron's *Don Juan*—

Know this, in art that thing alone is evil

Which shuns the one plain word that shames the Devil,—  
it has something of the wit and gaiety of its famous predecessor though rather more pathos.

In this same year Blunt published 'the finally corrected' version of *Esther*, a narrative which he had begun in blank verse long ago as a young attaché in Paris and had later transformed—astutely, since he is most successful with the sonnet—into a sonnet sequence. With a background of imaginary scenes and events it tells again the story of his love for Skittles, but

he who reads shall find

That which he brings to it of heaven or hell.

The poet, an innocent youth with his 'John the Baptist's face', arrives at Lyons after a summer of wandering in the Alps. There at the Lyons fair, as he stands gazing at the 'two female monsters', one fat, one thin, in the 'Booth of Beauty', a woman in the crowd clutches his arm.

She was a little woman dressed in black,  
Who stood on tiptoe with a childish air,  
Her face and figure hidden in a 'saque',  
All but her eyes and forehead and dark hair,  
Her brow was pale, but it was lit with light,  
And mirth flashed out of it, it seemed in rays.  
A childish face, but wise with woman's wit,  
And something, too, pathetic in its gaze.

He falls in love with her at sight, is shamed by an invitation to pinch the knee of the fat monster, 'the ox-eyed queen', is laughed at, and flees. Later in the evening he meets his love again coming from the theatre where she plays the heroine in

*Manon Lescaut* and they wander together through the streets, her charms infatuating him more and more.

Who might describe the humours of that night,  
The mirth, the tragedy, the grave surprise  
The treasures of fair folly infinite  
Learned as a lesson from those childlike eyes?

Entering at last the house of that good soul Madame Blanche, 'her dressmaker', the young man succumbs to his love:

Life has given me much  
And pleasure much, and Heaven may yet have store  
Of nobler hopes to kindle and to touch,  
But never for all time, ah, never more,  
That delicate dawn of wonder when lips move  
First to the love of life and love of love.

They stay three days at Lyons, only three—

This was my term of glory. All who know  
Something of life will guess untold the end.

Blunt tells the story with an eloquence which rises from reflective discourse to high passion and heightens into poetry the everyday language and homely detail—

crowds agape and in the rain  
Watching on tiptoe and with stifled roar  
To see a rocket fired or a bull slain,

or 'laughter from a tavern door', and

the silence of strange streets,  
My own mute footfalls and the redolent gloom  
Of oil-lit thresholds.

He mocks his youth wittily, its innocence and shame and recklessness, but never belittles it. *Esther* has the truth to life and to the genius of poetry of the *Sonnets of Proteus* with the added interest of the story and the portrait of the young poet. It is the most important of Blunt's poems.



By his publisher's advice five stanzas were suppressed as being too outspoken, which were restored twenty-two years later in Blunt's collected poems. With *Esther* were published in 1892 a group of 'Love Lyrics', many of which had been included among the *Sonnets and Songs by Proteus*, and another sonnet sequence, 'Natalia's Resurrection', which contains some good passages but is too far-fetched. The book is dedicated 'to the hand that has forgotten, the ears that cannot hear, and the lips that shall speak of love no more for ever'.

Blunt was greatly troubled by the apparent failure of *Esther* on first publication to make the impression that it later achieved: he himself frankly ranked it among the great sonnet sequences. 'It is not reviewed for which I care little but', he wrote in bewilderment, 'even my friends are silent about it, and several of them disapprove. Only from George Meredith has a letter of high approval come, and one from York Powell at Oxford.' Powell had long been a sympathetic friend in literary matters; Meredith's praise, being less expected, gave him great satisfaction.

As a poet Meredith stood well below Swinburne in Blunt's opinion. Swinburne to him was the first of lyric poets in his generation, perhaps the greatest England had produced 'in any age, the old ballad writers alone excepted, and these stand by themselves immeasurably above all'. But from him Blunt never received any commendation; indeed, Swinburne refused to have anything to do with him on the ground that he was 'a Jesuit in disguise working in clerical interests'. Meredith and Blunt, on the other hand, were sympathetic in many matters. 'Blunt,' said Meredith, 'is one of the few honest men we have in public life.' Though as their literary reader Meredith had caused Messrs. Chapman & Hall in 1867 to turn down Blunt's first little volume of mixed prose and verse Blunt bore him no grudge—'it was a fortunate refusal'. And Meredith had done in verse one great work, *Modern Love*. It was the only poem, Blunt said, which Meredith had drawn direct from personal experience, and he profoundly admired it.

In 1891 Morris had published at the Kelmscott Press a now much prized edition of *The Love Songs and Lyrics of Proteus and Love Sonnets*, the only Kelmscott book in which the initials are printed in red. It comprises the poems which had appeared in 1881 along with the best of the love poems written by Blunt during the intervening decade.<sup>7</sup> The proofs of this edition, like the proofs of many of Blunt's books, were corrected by Lady Gregory. Four years later W. E. Henley, 'the hospital poet (a bitter talker, but a sayer of good things)', with Wyndham's enthusiastic support, proposed the publication of a selection of all Blunt's poems, including *Esther* in cut form. He wanted to run Blunt 'into a more public place as poet' than he then occupied. The selection, in which the only previously unpublished matter was the first part of the 'Quatrains of Youth', came out in 1898 with an illuminating critical preface by Henley.

Apart from these volumes a multitude of occasional verses, birthday odes, valentines, and sonnets in every mood, flowed from Blunt's pen during these years. No request found him unresponsive—a hymn was produced for Charles Gatty's Translations; a sonnet for the copy of the Kelmscott edition of the *Sonnets of Proteus* that Lord Dufferin wished to have for the 'Helen's Tower Library'. He made his first essay in dramatic form with *The Bride of the Nile*, a semi-serious extravaganza written in 1893 as a relief to his feelings in regard to Egypt and to make fun of Baring and the British Occupation. The plot was taken from an incident, told by Abulfeda the Arabian historian, supposed to have happened at the time of the Arab invasion by Amru, when relations between Egypt and the Roman Empire resembled those of 1893 between Egypt and the British Empire. At amateur performances first at Crabbet, later at Newbuildings, the play was acclaimed a success. Four years afterwards he wrote the 'Mid-Victorian Drama' *The Little Left Hand*, never played but published among his collected poems.

EGYPT AGAIN AND LAST EASTERN  
ADVENTURES

## I

BLUNT's choice for his first dramatic attempt of a subject which lent itself to satire on the British Occupation of Egypt, shows that his interest in the East and in the politics of Egypt was still much alive. This is well borne out by the history of his winters at Sheykh Obeyd.

Six years after the restoration of Sheykh Obeyd the 'alarming intelligence' reached him that there was on foot a scheme—'Projets d'Assainissements'—for the drainage of Cairo into the desert near Sheykh Obeyd. It had already reached the advanced stage of coloured surveys. Blunt wrote at once to Lord Cromer 'representing the economical folly of the project which had chosen the only district in the neighbourhood of Cairo suitable for building a rural suburb, seeing that it was the only one which possessed an abundance of good water in a sandy soil'. Fortunately his argument was hearkened to. No more was heard of the scheme and, not long after, the populous suburb of Heliopolis began to grow up in the very desert that was to have been defiled. Meantime the garden continued its remote and paradisiacal existence: 'a blooming look of extravagant growth . . . cows prosperous, mares in foal, every servant happy'. Each autumn the quality of its loveliness, the vivid colours, the depths of shade, the brilliancy of the light, gave him a fresh shock of pleasure. Life there, so astonishingly leisurely in outward aspect, had its tang for Blunt since he had entered again for a short spurt into the political arena.

With Baring, who in 1892 became Baron Cromer and later first Earl of Cromer, he remained on the good terms of 1889 for more than ten years even though he began almost at once to work against the Resident politically. During the early 'nineties, the period, Blunt thought, of Baring's 'first and best practical energies' when he had the reformation of abuses much at heart, Blunt did not suspect him of 'working, as he did so flagrantly later, less for the good of Egypt, than in English political and financial interests'. He had a forlorn hope that Cromer might do some good in Egypt. Tewfik's death early in 1892 and the succession of his son as the new Khedive, Abbas II, provided Cromer with a fresh opportunity for a policy of reform. There was a possibility of establishing a constitutional government since Abbas was strongly native in sympathy.

As long as Tewfik had lived, it had been impossible for Blunt to make his peace formally with the Egyptian Government. But now his friends urged him to ask Cromer to present him to the new Khedive as he did other distinguished English visitors. It was more than eleven years since Blunt had paid a similar formal visit to Tewfik with Malet. 'When we were shown in to-day,' Blunt wrote in his diary of the second audience, 'we were met at the door of the room by a little young man in military undress whom I took to be an aide-de-camp, but who turned out to be Abbas himself, a quite unmilitary figure of proportions which made him look like a woman dressed up in man's clothes. He has, however, a very good manner in talking, and a pleasant smile, with brown eyes, and just a tinge of russet in his hair. He reminded me much of his grandfather, Ismaïl, and has just the same sort of French accent, talking French well but not perfectly. He showed no sign of shyness, and treated Baring with easy politeness, without any sign of special deference; me he treated with considerable amiability.' Although the talk turned on nothing of particular interest Abbas seemed to Blunt to show 'considerable intelligence'. 'I shall be surprised,' he added,

'if he does not give Baring trouble.' Much, Blunt thought, might be done with him if he were cleverly managed, but he would not bear driving with any but a very light rein.

Baring, however, read the Khedive otherwise. Long afterwards Blunt remembered that his manner to Abbas during the interview had been 'very abrupt, like that of a schoolmaster to schoolboy'. Baring missed, Blunt believed, a chance of making a fresh start with the new Khedive towards a National Government on constitutional lines and by his subsequent management so warped the Khedive's political powers that he became merely the ineffectual rebellious creature of officialdom. But not until the summer of 1902 was Blunt sure of this when the Khedive in England announced his desire to visit Blunt at Crabbet and then at the last moment, after all preparations had been made, under official pressure failed to appear. The rebuff not only hurt Blunt's pride sorely, but also shook his confidence in the strength of Abbas's convictions. After that he ceased to have the audiences with the Khedive which had punctuated his previous winters in Egypt.

Ten months after their first interview, however, his faith was still fresh. Learning that Abbas was 'hand in glove' with the members of the Party of Liberty, as the constitutional party was now called, he sent messages to the effect that if Abbas really wanted Parliamentary government he should make a stand for it. This advice, he felt, strengthened the Khedive's determination some months later to engineer the *coup d'état* of 1893, a complete change of ministry arranged without the cognizance of Cromer. As a particular step this *coup d'état* was not one that Blunt would have advised, for its result was a 'victory' for Cromer that might have been predicted. All that Blunt had urged was that the Khedive should make known his desires frequently and openly.

The Egyptian Prime Minister at this time was an old enemy, Riaz Pasha. Having done his best to bring the English into Egypt he now detested their presence there, came over to Blunt's point of view and chose him as confidant and adviser.

The irony of the situation was not lost upon Blunt and he made use of the new friendship by suggesting to Riaz that he should convoke the General Assembly and act through it. He also counselled the Sultan's representative in Egypt to encourage Riaz, and agreed to go himself to Constantinople to try to gain the Sultan's support. Meantime, to make the situation clear, he wrote any number of letters to political personages in England, discussed matters frankly with English officials and visitors at Cairo, and most important, wrote an article for the April *Nineteenth Century* that did some good in presenting the anti-protectorate case to those who believed in Cromer's point of view as the only possible one.

The journey to Constantinople, undertaken at the end of April, 1893, turned out to be about as unfruitful in political achievement as his former one in 1884. He might have obtained, of course, an orthodox audience with the Sultan by getting the British Ambassador, who received him very cordially, to present him. But such an audience would have resulted merely in the usual 'polite interchange of compliments'. To accomplish his purpose he needed a longer and less formal interview. He had a letter of introduction from the Sultan's representative at Cairo to 'the Sultan's chief intermediary between Yildiz Palace and visitors of distinction'—but unfortunately, it described Blunt as 'a *rich* Englishman who had for many years defended the cause of the Arabs against the English Government'. Having learned long since never to give nor to receive presents in his dealings with Orientals, Blunt disappointed the expectations aroused by the word 'rich' and soon realized that little would be effected through 'the Sultan's chief intermediary'. Good luck, nevertheless, seemed to be with him for he found both the Seyyid Jemal-ed-Din and Sabunji in Constantinople and high in the Sultan's favour.

Sabunji was most friendly and 'in fine feather, established at Yildiz as the Sultan's translator and a court spy'. Jemal-ed-Din seemed quite willing to consign to oblivion the episode of the umbrella in the back room at James Street. 'The old

Afghan,' Blunt wrote, 'received us (Blunt and his daughter) with open arms and embraced me on both cheeks in a room filled with reverend Turks and made Judith sit in the arm-chair of state, and gave us tea and coffee and entertained us for an hour and a half. Anne had written him a note of excuse in Arabic, which was read out two or three times with great admiration at its style and correctness. Then we had a long talk on politics, partly in Arabic, partly in French, which Jemal-ed-Din talks pretty fluently . . . . Altogether a satisfactory visit. There seems a good chance now of my getting my audience at Yildiz.'

Meanwhile he renewed old friendships—notably with Count Nélidoff, the Russian Ambassador who had been his intimate friend when they were attachés together at Athens. He saw again the old Sultan of Johore and his suite, visitors of the past winter at Sheykh Obeyd. They were 'in the seventh heaven of delight' over the reception accorded them by the Sultan of Turkey largely owing to Blunt's efforts on Johore's behalf at Cairo. With General Walter Blunt Pasha, an A.D.C. of the Sultan, 'a fine-looking old man in a very smart uniform' who had been in the Turkish service since 1878 and who claimed relationship with him—Blunt 'hardly knew on what ground—he went to the bazaars and to the Selamlık. And, following his usual line, he visited the Sultan's mares at the Sweet Waters and his stallions at Tildiz—'altogether the grandest Arab collection' he had seen.

So the week allotted by Blunt to his stay at Constantinople passed. Though much good will had been expressed, no audience had transpired. Those who were trying to arrange for it besought him to put off his departure. But he had given his time on arrival. He was obdurate: 'Am I a fakir, I said, to sit at the Palace door waiting. I am not the Sultan's servant, nor will I dance attendance on any king in the world. If the Sultan wants to see me he must send and say so and I will come, but to-night I go home.' And go he did—without a sense of total failure, since he had arranged to write to Jemal-

ed-Din letters from England which were to be shown to the Sultan in order to influence his action towards Egypt.

Much of Blunt's attention during the following summer in England was given to the discussion of Egyptian politics. But with the so-called 'Frontier Incident' that took place while he was in Egypt the next winter, the spurt given the Nationalist Movement by Abbas's early endeavours ended. Blunt was away on a desert journey when the Incident took place. Realizing that he could do nothing to support the Nationalists, he kept out of the quarrel and continued to abstain from interference for some years save for an occasional remonstrance against flagrant injustice.

In November, 1895, Blunt made his first journey up the Nile to Wady Halfa. It was characteristic of him not to have taken before such a purely sight-seeing trip. With a taste that dates him Victorian he found in Philae alone—the Philae of pre-dam days—a monument to command his unqualified praise: 'Philae . . . is perhaps the one perfect thing in the world, and anything added to or taken from it would probably spoil it'. The Temple of Medinet Habu, too, he thought 'a really fine thing' and Karnak in the moonlight affected him deeply. 'But I am left with the impression,' he wrote, 'that the Nile itself, with its great flow of water and its evergreen banks and eternal youth is the really interesting thing, far finer than its monuments'.

At Wady Halfa a deputation of natives of Dongola begged him to assist them in obtaining permission to return to their own country. On getting back to Cairo he took up their case with Lord Cromer who referred the matter to Kitchener, the Sirdar. Kitchener finally refused the natives all permission to return on the ground that he did not wish Dongola re-peopled lest it serve as a base for Dervish raids. 'Rubbish,' was Blunt's comment. Some months later he was further incensed by hearing that an advance was to be made immediately to Dongola by arrangement with the German and Austrian Governments, so as to make a diversion in favour of the Italians, who were



rapidly getting the worst of their war with Abyssinia. Such obvious sacrifice of Egyptian for European interests, entailing a re-opening of the Soudan war, seemed unbelievable—‘and what has Italy done for Egypt to deserve Egyptian help?’ About all this Blunt wrote the inevitable letters of protest to *The Times*, and, following a long interview with the Khedive, sent an article entitled ‘The Truth of the Dongola Adventure’ to the *Nineteenth Century* (May, 1896). For some time after this he made no more heated sallies against oppression.

The year of the Dongola affair had seen ‘the last’, Blunt wrote, ‘and perhaps the hardest of all the many desert journeys that Lady Anne and I undertook alone together, and as such stands out in my memory as one of the most delightful’. It was undertaken, like previous yearly expeditions, for the purpose of making maps intended, Blunt said, for private use ‘not for the Geographical Society (of which I am almost the oldest member) because I have long since convinced myself that it makes itself the precursor and instrument of Europe’s penetrations and conquests against the wild races of mankind’.

Armed with such scant and inaccurate maps as the Cairo Intelligence Department possessed of the country between Cairo and the Red Sea, the Blunts set out, accompanied only by their Bedouins and a guide of the Maaze tribe, through an almost entirely unexplored region of the Eastern desert—‘through the Maaze country south of the Kalala Mountains to the granite range of Jebel Sháreb southwards to Kúfra, Dokhán, and Kitár, regaining the Nile at Keneh, a journey of four hundred miles of uninhabited desert, made in twenty days, of the greatest possible interest’. But the map was not completed until two years later when Blunt made a six days’ trip alone with his Bedouins, travelling fast on *delúls*. It was a bitter cold journey on the upper plateaux of the Eastern desert and nearly finished him since his health, none too strong at best, had been broken down by the trip westward to Siwah which he had undertaken during the previous year, 1897—



WILFRID BLUNT IN EGYPT



the year intervening between the two map-making expeditions eastward.

## 2

In 1897 it had seemed to him that the pilgrimage into the Tripolitan desert of which he had talked with Terence Bourke at Tunis three years earlier must be made—then or never. The old desire to seclude himself in a far distant hermitage had come upon him again with renewed force.

The subtle wonder of the desert came  
And touched my longing with its breath of flame

I too, methought, sad child of a new age,  
Would learn its mystery and inscribe my name,

Clothed in the garments of its ancient past,  
My race forgotten and my creed outcast,

On some lone pile whence centuries look down  
On days unchanged the earliest with the last.

Early in February he met at Cairo his friend, Abdullah Minjowar el Jibali, a member of the confraternity of the Senussi, who lived in the Fayoum and would help to put him on his way. A few days later he started with four Bedouins and Salem, his Egyptian body servant for cook, six camels of his own, one with foal at foot, and his mare, Yemama. There was, he knew, a little danger in the expedition, but he looked forward to it eagerly, regretting only that Lady Anne was not to accompany him. She and his daughter rode a short distance with him on the first morning and 'saw a blue kingfisher on the way', Blunt wrote, 'but I missed seeing it, which I take for an ill omen'.

The hospitality of Abdullah Minjowah held them up at his Castle el Jibali for two days uncomfortably among the flies. Abdullah readily agreed to send two men with camels and a head man, Beseys, to guide them to El Wah (the small oasis),

Siwah, Jerabub, where the Zagwiyeh or monastery of the Senussi was, and Jebel Akhdar. He arranged for Beseys to carry letters of credence from him introducing Blunt, to insure favourable reception, as the son of Hajji Batran of Aleppo. Blunt had known Hajji Batran's son at Aleppo and would greatly have preferred to travel as he almost always had done under his own name and nationality. Abdullah would consent only to changing the letter to the Sheykh el Senussi or his representative, the others he persisted in leaving as they were, with the fiction of Hajji Batran's son. In the event the scheme proved to be ill conceived for it brought misunderstanding and attack at Siwah.

On the twelfth of February, they really began their journey: they struck southwards from the Fayoum to the last water before the oasis of El Wah, water that gushed forth, so the Arabs said, only when a caravan approached and in volume as great as the caravan happened to need. Three days of monotonous going across gravelly hamad, and they reached El Wah. From this point on Blunt travelled under Syrian identity, and from here Beseys proved to be helpless as a guide: it was forty-three years since he had been over the road. Blunt was obliged to hire a tall black Sudani, Osman. Soon it transpired that he, too, though useful in other ways, was little good as a guide; he had been over the route only once, twenty-five years before, by night and going in the opposite direction, escaping from slavery at Siwah to freedom at El Wah.

The rest of the journey was so full of hardship and danger that Blunt found it easy to believe that somewhere in this desert Cambyses and his army had disappeared in ancient times. His own party were within an ace of a like fate. They were short of water and had lost the caravan route; but for their faith in a mirage they might have wandered and died in the desert. After floundering over ridge after ridge of sand and galloping across plains of gravel Blunt saw far away what seemed to be an oasis. As they drew near it disappeared, the bushes became a pile of black stones; then, miraculously, they

found that the pile of stones marked the edge of the great caravan road which they had not seen for two days. February 27th brought them within sight of the oasis of Zeytoun and, on high ground, a Senussi monastery. There, at the group of buildings like a small village, they were made welcome, the camels and mare watered by servants, and Blunt and his followers given dates and milk by a 'brother'.

Pressing on, they camped that afternoon a half-mile south of the easternmost of the two towns of Siwah in the sand among palm groves. That night, a member of the Eastern town, Mohammed Said, to whom Beseys had brought a letter, called upon them and was feasted. As he was going, a number of persons arrived: the governmental representative, and the Maown, or police officer, and a group of sheykhs from the western town. Unprepossessing men—the Siwan type at its best Blunt described as perhaps the ugliest in the world, yellow skinned, brown haired, snub-nosed, hare-lipped and light-eyed—they drank coffee and asked many questions, made curious by old Beseys' talk and boasts; but they showed no sign of hostility. During the night a thief stole Blunt's carpet shelter on which the guests had sat outside his tent—another evil omen. The next morning, as Blunt was giving orders about the provisions to be bought, an armed party of about two hundred men on horses and camels and on foot suddenly appeared from the western town. Except for Osman and one Bedouin, his servants vanished. To attempt defence was futile. Within half a minute the hurly-burly burst forth. Blunt was caught by the wrists and pulled out, the tent toppling about him. He was yanked this way and that, his clothes were torn off, he was given several blows on the head, a severe one on the neck, and another from some weapon on the cheek. The hubbub and confusion were tumultuous.

Luckily Blunt made no attempt at self defence, putting himself as soon as possible under the protection of one of the attacking party. He was led off to the town—where the women were shrilling the triumph from the housetops—expecting to

be killed, but interested none the less in the fantastic spectacle. He was taken into a large room with seats, the council chamber of the sheykhs of the Western town. Marching to the best place, he sat down and called for water. It was brought. The sheykhs seemed now to be by way of protecting him. He asked the reason for the attack. No intelligible answer was forthcoming. He then said that he was from Cairo and a friend of Effendina (the Khedive). They said they cared nothing for Effendina. At that point the Maown entered. He had offered Blunt his services the night before, so Blunt now whispered to him that he was an Englishman. The Maown became still more courteous. Blunt then whispered to a sheykh next him that he was an Englishman. The word passed round. There was a great scurry to restore the plunder and to find a scapegoat for what they now judged to have been a great mistake.

The chastened sheykhs restored to Blunt his belongings bit by bit and provided him and his servants, who had returned, with quarters in the government house whence they could observe from the roof the life of the town, their camels safe in the courtyard below. Ramadan ended the night after the attack and Blunt watched the scene of frenzy and fanaticism in the streets below. Probably, he thought, Ramadan was the best explanation of the attack. Abdullah's plan of disguise and letter to Mohammed Said, and Beses's too fluent talk, had filled with suspicion the hot-headed sheykhs, their nerves overwrought by Ramadan fasting.

'The Senussia in these oasis towns,' Blunt noted in his diary, 'is a mere madness and ought to be suppressed. It is all the same, picturesque and interesting. I have slept the last two nights on the house-top, and the midnight call to prayer is the most impressive thing I ever heard.' 'If the condition of Siwah,' he added, 'is all the fruit the Senussia has to show, the tree can be little worth.' To continue the journey in search of a pleasant hermitage among the Senussia seemed hopeless, and on March 3rd, Blunt began the expedition homeward. One of the two guides upon whose hire he spent almost his

last money had taken part in the attack and remarked to him: 'I have been inquiring about you from your servants, and I find we made a great mistake about you. It will ruin Siwah!'

Travelling by the shortest northern route, suffering much of the way from want of water, they arrived at Sheykh Obeyd on St. Patrick's Day, after fourteen and a half days of difficult marching over four hundred and thirteen miles. As usual the guides had been of little use; Blunt himself had steered the party, 'taking careful bearings at every height'.

The low stars led me on as with a voice,  
Stars of the scorpion's tail in the deep South.

As he neared Sheykh Obeyd he met Lady Anne on her way through the palm grove from the station. 'I could hardly speak for tears of joy,' he wrote. 'I had been away the forty days, during which she was to expect no news from me, and this was the forty-first, and during the whole of that time I had not spoken a word of any language but Arabic, till I had come even to think in Arabic and I was weak and worn out, and famished in mind and body.'

Not long after his return he drew up for the Government, at Sir Eldon Gorst's suggestion, a memorandum of the circumstances of his journey, for he felt that if the Egyptian Government nominally ruled the oasis of Siwah they ought to know of its rebellious state and make it their business to keep order there. The place was a spot of ferment, dangerous for all travellers. Had he himself not been reading on the outward journey Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*—'certainly the best prose written in the last centuries'—and had he not, in accordance with Doughty's counsel, taken a passive line at the time of the attack, he believed he would probably have lost his life. As it was, he wrote, the expedition had cleared his mind on one important point: 'It is as to religion. My experience of the Senussia at Siwah has convinced me that there is *no* hope anywhere to be found in Islam. I had made myself a romance about these reformers, but I see that it has no substantial basis,



and I shall never go farther now than I am in the Mohammedan direction. The less religion in the world perhaps, after all, the better'.

## 3

The journey had left him in wretched health. Hardships that earlier he might have borne easily now took their toll and the next two years were an unhappy period of illness. Even Sheykh Obeyd, the winter after the Siwah expedition, seemed far less delightful than usual, too primitive to be suited to an invalid; and even though—possibly because—he managed the map-making journey into the Eastern desert, he left Egypt in March bidding farewell to Sheykh Mohammed Abdu as though he were parting for ever from a dearest friend. He suffered such pain that he seemed to be dying, and longed for 'the extinction of the grave'. Only infinitesimal doses of morphia assuaged the pain.

Early in April he arrived in miserable plight at Saughton Grange for the Easter holiday with George Wyndham and his wife, Lady Grosvenor. She suggested that he should make a pilgrimage to the holy well of St. Winifred to try the effect of its miraculous waters. He received the idea with enthusiasm. He was superstitious by nature, and took portents, charms, even miracles more than half seriously. Besides, they appealed to his dramatic sense.

Fortified with a dose of morphia, after a bad night of pain, he set off with his hosts by train from Chester to Holywell, arriving when everyone was away at dinner and he was able to bathe alone. 'There was no difficulty,' Blunt wrote, 'in that sweet old place in supposing ourselves back in the fifteenth century'. But, he continued, 'I suppose no pilgrim ever washed there with less Christian faith and at the same time with so little mocking spirit. I have a belief in holy places and holy people quite apart from all religious creeds, and I felt

a great confidence in the saint that she would do me good. . . . I did the traditional three journeys through the water up to my armpits, going down into it by steps and up the opposite side, and then took a complete dip over my head in the outer tank and knelt on St. Bruno's stone'.

The 'miraculous cure' that he felt he had undergone the next day when all pain suddenly disappeared was, alas, of short duration. No sooner had he left Saughton than he began to suspect that the Saint had made a fool of him. Neither old nor new doctors in London were able to help him and he retired to Newbuildings: 'The world', he wrote, 'is only meant for those who are in sound health, and the maxim of our forefathers was a sound one, that a dying man should keep wholly out of sight'. A few days later the crisis came. A blood vessel broke and for a week or more he lay in danger of death, nursed by Cowie, Lady Anne's maid, Miss Lawrence, the hospital nurse who was to attend him for the rest of his life, and by Sydney Cockerell, now Sir Sydney Cockerell,<sup>1</sup> who had recently become his secretary. 'Then I recognized,' he wrote, 'that St. Winifred had only deferred her benefits, and that, as in the case of most miracles, she had chosen a natural road of cure. However that might be, the cure, though it nearly killed me, was an indisputable one. The pain from which I had been suffering so long had left me desperately weak, it is true, in body, but clear in mind, and able once more to take an interest in life, and at the end of three weeks to resume my diary.' Although far from well he was sufficiently gay to write at the end of the year: 'Intellectually I still feel growth, and while growth continues one is not yet old'.

Five months later he was well enough to make his pilgrimage of thanksgiving to Holywell in drizzle and fog with Miss Lawrence to deposit at the shrine his crutches bound up with a nightgown and a label: 'Set here in thankful token of a cure from long sickness after bathing in St. Winifred's Well. By her servant W. S. B., October 19, 1898.'<sup>2</sup>

The five months of convalescence had been anything but a quiet recuperation. He arranged his papers and books, putting a new bookplate into the latter where, he wrote with gratification, 'it looks a natural part of the volumes as the book-plate was cut by the man Morris employed for his armorial designs'. Cockerell entertained him with his 'interesting recollections of Morris' with whom he had been in close association until Morris's death; and, somewhat later, helped him to buy at the sale of Morris's books a 'Gerarde's Herbal, a Berners Froissart, and Malory's King Arthur in the Copeland edition of 1557, the last a book to lie always on one's table'—

But less, methinks, for their high deeds that bore  
Their crests so proudly than the one lost sound  
Of Launcelot's step at the Queen's Chamber door.

'Cockerell', Blunt said, 'is a treasure'—before many months passed he had become a dear friend, perhaps the most trusted of all Blunt's later friends.

Soon he began literary work, writing several sonnets and an inscription in verse for the table that had been used by Morris as a dining-table at the Red House and elsewhere and had been given to Blunt by Mrs. Morris to stand in the Newbuildings hall. At the time of Tennyson's death he had written the plaintive sonnet asking

What voice shall rouse the dull world from its sleep  
And lead its requiem as when Grief was young,  
And thou in thy rapt youth, Time's bards among,  
Captured our ears, and we looked up and heard  
Spring's sweetest music on thy mourning tongue  
And knew thee for Pain's paradisal bird;

and now, in response to a request from Mrs. Wyndham he wrote the acrostical sonnet about Morris and Burne-Jones, who had died in mid-June, beginning

Mad are we all, maids, men, young fools alike and old,  
    . . . We were not as these were,

Intent, untiring souls who proved time till their death.

The point of view of the poem is characteristic:

—What is life's wealth? To do. Its loss? To dream  
    and wait.

But he was hardly just in counting himself, as he does in this sonnet, among the 'dazed sheep', the 'sluggards' of the world. Even set against the standard of Morris and Burne-Jones, he was no sluggard.

Early in September came word of the defeat of the Khalifa at Omdurman where countless dervishes were slaughtered. The Jingo rejoicing over the 'wholesale massacre' moved Blunt's bile. He protested in a letter to *The Times*. Except for an objection on the part of General Gordon's sister to vengeance being taken for her brother's death, no other voice was raised in disapproval.

A month after the Omdurman outrage, the Fashoda incident—'nothing in it more respectable than the wrangle of two highwaymen over a captured purse, morally both sides on a level'—moved him again to write an article, this time for the *Nineteenth Century*. But the *Nineteenth Century*, in the person of Knowles, replied that it would be unwise to publish the article. Some months later Blunt returned to the charge against the Soudan campaign, more particularly against the proposed Parliamentary grant to Kitchener. He wrote letters, he urged questions in Parliament, he thundered about the desecration of the Mahdi's tomb—a 'foul deed', as, to his delight, he learned it had been termed by young Winston Churchill in a book on the Soudan Campaign. For the desecration he held Kitchener responsible, not Gordon's nephew who was popularly supposed to be its perpetrator. He defended young Colonel Gordon stoutly, thereby earning the warm gratitude of the Colonel's family. Kitchener he never forgave—although had he known him personally he would,

he thought, probably have liked him. 'He was a *frondeur*,' Blunt wrote, 'and had a wholesome contempt of officialdom and the commonplace hypocrisies of the British Empire. He really, I think, preferred the East to the West, the Islamic to the Christian idea, but he was brutal in his methods and used what he had of sympathy with Islam to betray it to Europe.' So Blunt continued to attack him, despite Kitchener's occasional friendly advances made through Lady Carlisle.

In the difficulties now arising in the Transvaal, his sympathies were with neither Boers nor British. Their quarrel presented itself to him chiefly as a possible alleviation of 'the condition of the only people there whose interests I really care for in the quarrel, namely the blacks. It will also be a beautiful exposure of our English sham philanthropy, if at the very moment the Peace Congress is sitting at the Hague, we flout its mediation and launch into an aggressive war. Anything is better than the general hand-shaking of the great white thieves and their amicable division of spoils.' As between the two 'great white thieves', however, his sympathies were with the Boers. 'The Boer population . . . described as menacing the British Empire, with its two hundred million souls, is exactly that of Brighton,' Blunt wrote; and at the first opportunity after the declaration of war, sending £50, he joined the 'Stop the War Committee'. It was a rash step, taken with some qualms of conscience, for he hesitated to do anything to stop a war which might 'smash up the British Empire'. But he took the risk and, as he was in England during the winter of 1899, was able to be of considerable aid in backing the opponents of the Government's policy in both the Transvaal and the Soudan.

Owing chiefly to his illness Blunt did not accompany Lady Anne and his daughter to Egypt in the autumn of 1898, but

spent most of the winter at 'Gorse End' in the New Forest, near Lyndhurst, which he had rented in September in order to get easy hunting and to live much out of doors. His principal friend in the neighbourhood was Sir William Harcourt, whom he saw frequently at Malwood and with whom he had many spirited discussions. In February he went up to London to join Lady Lytton at the family dinner-party in honour of the marriage of his daughter with Lord Lytton's younger son, Neville. The marriage itself took place in Cairo and it fell to the lot of Lord Cromer as Resident to give the bride away. His reply to the Queen's telegram of inquiry about the wedding was bald—'marriage duly performed'. The Queen, Lady Lytton explained, 'would have liked something gushing but of course Lord Cromer treated it entirely in an official way and would go to no expense'. The marriage 'has been an event of supreme satisfaction', Blunt noted in his diary.

In the course of the winter it was arranged, through Mrs. Wyndham, an old friend of the painter, for Watts to do a portrait of Blunt. The plan turned out more successfully than that made for Blunt in his youth by Mrs. Cameron—the portrait was a fine one, though Watts, Blunt thought, exaggerated in calling it the best that he had ever painted, and during the sittings the painter expounded with apt illustrations ideas most sympathetic to the sitter. The two parted on terms of real affection.

In the spring Blunt purchased Fernycroft, thirty-one acres of woodland in the New Forest, part of the hereditary lands of Beaulieu Abbey, an outlying croft where the monks kept their cows. Writing of a day of partridge shooting there with Mark Napier and Terence Bourke in September, he recorded: 'I shot well, the first time since my illness, killing twelve birds in as many shots, but I am no longer keen for sport of any kind, and go out principally as an old custom and to justify the expense of game preserving.'

His logic about shooting was that wild birds and beasts

who do no harm to man have a right to be left in absolute peace. Those who are helped to breed by being protected may fairly pay a certain tribute, just as tame beasts do, though the higher law would be to let all live. Blunt himself gave up pursuit of the higher law after a week of vegetarianism when at a party following a long cross-country drive he was reduced to dining off two mushrooms and a nut. The subject of the protection of animals, however, continued to exercise him and resulted in the pleasing paradox of shooting in England to preserve the game laws but rigorously opposing all shooting in Egypt where there were none to preserve.

For 'the brutal attitude of modern man towards animals', tolerated by no other great religion, he held Christianity responsible. It forms part of the brief against the Christian races of *Satan Absolved*, the poem upon which he was working at this time.

The idea of writing *Satan Absolved* he owed to Herbert Spencer. Blunt's letter on Omdurman in *The Times* and an article on *The Wind and the Whirlwind* moved Spencer to write towards the end of 1898, begging him to undertake a poem in the form of 'a dialogue in Heaven after the manner of Goethe's *Faust* between God and Satan, Satan complaining that mankind has surpassed him in wickedness, sacrificing to Thor and Odin while nominally sacrificing to Jehovah'. Blunt doubted his own powers and also the possibility 'of getting the subject listened to at the present moment', but he set to work. He translated Spencer's convention of sacrificing to ancient deities into precise modern terms. Man, he contended, has never lost his simian characteristics, his love of treachery and evil. These have developed most fully under cover of the Christian virtues and the Christian belief in the immortality of the soul; and the Anglo-Saxon race, the strongest of those who profess Christianity, is the most impious of all. 'The hypocrisy and all-acquiring greed of modern England is an atrocious spectacle—one which, if there be any justice in Heaven, must bring a curse from God,

as it has surely already made the angels weep.' In this sentence lies the kernel of the poem.

The irony of the indictment is biting and the close reasoning concerning the gradual perversion of Christian teaching, interesting. The verses—six foot Alexandrine couplets—move easily and are often rhetorically good. Sometimes they achieve fine poetry.

The stars leaped and fled,  
As hounds, in their young strength.

But Heaven's antechamber is oddly like a Victorian parlour—

How sweet in truth Heaven is, its floor of sandal wood,  
Its old-world furniture, its linen long in press,  
Its incense, mummeries, flowers, its scent of holiness!

God himself is a fussy old potentate, well-meaning but ignorant and rather vain, bewildered by the charges made against his rule. And the angels are servile, silly beings. Even Satan, the proud and scathing hero, remains, when all is said, a man. This nineteenth century realism gives polemic edge and was deliberate—Blunt called the poem 'A Victorian Mystery'—but it is one of the reasons why *Satan Absolved* falls short of its author's best work.

Just before finishing it in May 1899, Blunt travelled down to Brighton to see Spencer. He found the old philosopher in carpet slippers, valetudinarian and dessicated, and was unable to feel himself 'in the presence of a great man'. This disappointment did not prevent him from appreciating Spencer's clear and logical mind or his achievement or from acknowledging a debt of gratitude to him. But it added to his enjoyment of Spencer's discomfort at having *Satan Absolved* dedicated to him. Spencer was 'in a terrible fright lest it should be found out that he gave the idea "on account", he said, "of the *odium theologicum* and the injury it might do the spread of his philosophy".' It was no comfort to him to share the odium with Watts whose 'Angel of Pity weeping over the dead birds' wings' formed the frontispiece.



When, early in October, the advance copy of the poem arrived from its publisher, John Lane, Mafeking had been invested, the Boers were advancing steadily southward, Swinburne had just brought out 'a ridiculous sonnet in favour of the war', and Kipling had been publishing imperialistic pieces in *The Times*. 'My *Satan Absolved*', Blunt wrote, 'must stand for poetry on the other side.' He received a number of commendatory letters and from Sir Wilfrid Lawson some verses protesting amusingly against the total darkness of Blunt's view, ending:

Some good yet we may see when there comes to the front  
The excellent doctrine of Lawson and Blunt.

But, 'as was to be expected', the poem was 'fearfully maltreated in the newspapers'. A severe article appeared in the *Chronicle* quoting Newman, and complaining of Blunt's profanity. As the Boer War went more and more against the British Army, the Press notices of *Satan Absolved* became more and more vindictive. They began by admitting that the poetry had some eloquence; then it was found clever, but vulgar; then blasphemous, vulgar and stupid. Finally the condemnation was extended to all Blunt's poems. It was even discovered—erroneously, needless to say—that the sonnets of Proteus were a plagiarism of Meredith's *Modern Love*. However, it was not, as Blunt observed, the first time that he had had the world on his back. He himself felt the poem to be 'really the most important of all I have written though not likely ever to be much read'. He was more content with life in consequence, feeling he had done all he could, and made his 'individual protest against the abominations of the Victorian Age'.

Through Kegan Paul, his publisher, Blunt learned that Father Tyrrell, the Modernist, at that time still a member of the Society of Jesus, agreed that *Satan Absolved* was 'a real discovery in that branch of philosophy' concerning man's position in the universe, and had said, among other approving things, that Blunt's account of the Incarnation 'was precisely

the one he had always had in his mind'. Upon acquaintance Father Tyrrell proved to be highly sympathetic—'as enlightened a priest as I have ever met', said Blunt. A few months before, Mivart's startling article on 'the Continuity of Catholicism' had led Blunt to feel that a Catholic writer equally bold might, forty years earlier, have saved him much infidelity; and in Father Tyrrell, also, he found a priest whose outspoken courage might have saved his faith had he met it years before. A warm friendship sprang up between them, based on a mutual regard for each other's courage in 'heresy', and lasting until Father Tyrrell's death in 1909. When Father Tyrrell's posthumous volume of verse, *Versions and Perversions*, was published, Blunt was touched to find that it had been dedicated to him.

Another new friendship made in the year of the publication of *Satan Absolved* which continued to the end of Blunt's life was with Lady Margaret Sackville who visited him at Fernycroft. It was in great measure owing to his influence that she began at this time to write verse, and to his encouragement that she published years later her 'really admirable' volume of anti-war poems and, in 1919, the *Selected Poems* for which Blunt contributed a preface. He wrote many poems to her, some of them now published among his 'Later Sonnets', such as:

What price, child, shall I pay for your bright eyes  
(How large a debt!) the light they shed on me? . . .

—Nay, I can pay naught . . . .

Yet be my wealth yours, joys that fools deny,  
Knowledge of life, love, power as presbyter,  
The wit to teach youth's zeal to use its wings.

On the whole he was happy at Fernycroft. But towards the end of November he entered in his diary: 'Fernycroft stripped of its leaves looks melancholy enough and the thought of Egypt with its birds and butterflies is irresistible'. Within a few days he was off, looking forward with delight to the return to Sheykh Obeyd, otherwise feeling depressed enough:

'The only thing I love now is my cat, and I am obliged, alas, to leave it behind.'

## 5

The return to Sheykh Obeyd was like 'rising again from the dead. Everybody connected with the place', wrote Blunt ruefully, 'clearly took it for granted I should be seen in it no more, and acted on the supposition. Nothing very bad has been done, and some changes are for the better, but still they have been made. My gazelles have been sent to the Zoological Garden, some of the horses have been sold, the house has been rearranged. I feel like a guest in it—the *revenant*—the ghost who has returned. Perhaps it is all the more delightful, for the garden is in splendid leaf, the trees never had a thicker shade in a more brilliant sunshine.'

He was risen from the dead stronger in health than he had been since the Siwah journey. The year in England had done him good. And when in February Sydney Cockerell arrived in Egypt, he determined to turn his long-cherished dream of a pilgrimage to Mount Sinai into a reality. The party, made up of Blunt himself, Cockerell, Blunt's nurse Miss Lawrence, and two Arabs, Suleyman and Hassan, took passage on March 8th at Suez by the Khedivial steamer, the *Chibine*, for Tor, along with three or four hundred Moslem pilgrims bound for Mecca and Medina.

About three in the morning of the first night, while Blunt lay in his berth thinking over the lapse of years since he was last at Mount Sinai and 'the poor issue of our short lives', he felt the vessel shiver under a blow, and immediately after came a second blow. The ship had struck a coral reef. On deck they found the wind blowing strong and the pilgrims reciting prayers but no one was frightened and there seemed to be no immediate danger. Nothing could be done till daylight, so Blunt went below to sleep again.

In the morning they could make out that they were north of Ras Jehan, and later learned that no watch had been kept the previous evening and the vessel, far out of its course, had driven straight on a reef without slackening speed. One of the four boats with which the ship was wretchedly supplied had already been lost and a seaman drowned in putting off in it. The wind was rising steadily and the steamer began to heel over alarmingly. Blunt finished reading Tolstoy's *Resurrection*: 'It is a most depressing book, and makes one as willing as one can easily be to leave a life so miserable as Tolstoy shows it. . . . All the same one clings a bit to life,' Blunt jotted in his diary, 'there is a certain physical menace in death which it is ill to face, and I feel it more strongly this afternoon than I did last night when the danger was vaguer and newer. . . . It is the physical repulsion that one has, that of being knocked to pieces on the reef, or drowned in one's cabin. . . . My only satisfaction is to think Anne did not come with us.'

By the next morning the situation had become 'almost hopeless'. Waves swept the upper deck, the wind had increased in violence and, if it held, the ship would break up. The pilgrims prayed, and Blunt read the Gospels, and, as water began leaking into the cabin, said his 'usual prayers to the dead and to St. Winifred, who may help me as she did three years ago, a superstition which quiets the mind'. Otherwise things went on as before and soon the pilgrims' prayers grew quieter and Blunt settled down to a novel.

At first the pilgrims had not been friendly but after Blunt had sided with them against the Captain by insisting that a boat be put off to carry news of the wreck to Tor, their attitude changed. With one or two, Blunt and his companions made fast friends. Drinking-water was short and they doled out oranges with which they had come aboard supplied, thereby further ingratiating themselves. At sunset a great ship was sighted, but too far away to see the distress signals.

'We under our awning on the bridge,' Blunt wrote on the

fifth day, 'have passed a not quite uncomfortable night'—the fourth night. 'Only one woke every few minutes with a start, and thoughts forced themselves on one's mind of things beyond the world. There were signs of lightning in the hills in the direction of Mount Sinai, and one seemed to see in them God's anger in his dwelling place, perhaps at one's impiety at seeking to set foot on it, and for the attitude I have taken of having complained of his dereliction of his duty and neglect of the World and Man. Towards morning just in front of us stood the Scorpion, for the sky was clear, and it reminded me of many things. . . . 12th March—our fourth day on the reef, which is whiter than ever with foam—the wind stronger and the waves higher. The cabins aft are flooded, and the people are leaving them, and crowding on to the bridge. . . . The pilgrims are in straits for water, and I hear that a woman and child have died. The stewards, meanwhile (for the government of the vessel and the administration of the supplies are abominable) are selling soda water at exorbitant prices to the richer people. . . . Personally I have not drunk a tumbler of water in the last three days and have eaten nothing but half a dozen oranges. The morphia I have taken does away with both thirst and hunger.'

Then, 'behold as a *coup de théâtre*', H.M.S. *Hebe*, a gunboat, arrived from Suez to the rescue, and, when the sea abated, took Blunt's party aboard. Other ships by that time had arrived to take the pilgrims on to Jeddah. The *Hebe* returned to Suez. During the night the Captain, whose cabin he shared, asked Blunt what o'clock it was. 'I told him', wrote Blunt, 'a quarter to three. He was surprised at my knowing this when, having struck a match, he found that I was exactly right. I had calculated it by the stars in the Scorpion's tail, which are an excellent clock at this time of year, but sailors have forgotten these old-fashioned observations of the stars.'

The perils which he had encountered Blunt realized were of all too common occurrence in the pilgrim traffic in the Red Sea. He lost no time in laying before Lord Cromer and in

writing to *The Times* an account of the Khedivial steamship's disaster. A Naval Court of Inquiry was held at Suez; Blunt was thanked for his 'public-spirited action' in calling attention to the mismanagement of the pilgrim traffic; and eventually the pilgrims' hardships were somewhat alleviated.

## 6

The shipwreck on the *Chibine* was the last of Blunt's Eastern adventures and except for a short visit to Damascus with Lady Anne, Cockerell, and his nurse Miss Lawrence, in the spring of 1904 he attempted no more travels in the East. After farewell visits to the Khedive and his old neighbour Hassan, who besought him to have a lamb slain for Sheykh Obeyd in honour of the rescue, he returned to England, breaking the journey in Italy—at Brindisi, where he learned the good news of his grandson's birth; at Florence; at Lucca, where he had not been since 1852 and where he and Cockerell now paid a visit to Ouida; and at Turin, to the Duchess of Aosta, the Princesse Hélène with whom he had made friends in Scotland. The close of the year, however, found him back in Egypt in the retrospective mood induced by the turn of the century, writing a letter to *The Times* in a fine rage: 'The Shame of the Nineteenth Century'—a vivid indictment of the part played by England in exterminating other races and her consequent deterioration.

Of the new century he could prophesy 'nothing except that it will see the decline of the British Empire. Other worse Empires will rise perhaps in its place. . . . It all seems a very little matter here in Egypt,' he wrote, 'with the Pyramids watching us as they watched Joseph, when, as a young man four thousand years ago, perhaps in this very garden, he walked and gazed at the sunset behind them, wondering about the future just as I did this evening.'

Nor were the first years of the new century calculated to

encourage him concerning the Empire. The old Queen died; and the new King was hailed—somewhat mistakenly—as a ‘peacemaker’. But the monarchy of England is a constitutional one and imperial gain, he knew, had become a firmly-rooted ideal among the people of all classes.

News reached him in July 1901 of a conflict at Sheykh Obeid between some English officers and his Arab servants and of the arrest of his Arabs. The servants had been ordered to allow no one inside the walls during Blunt’s absence, partly for the sake of the brood mares, partly to protect the wild animals that found sanctuary there. When the young officers from the Cairo garrison suddenly burst into the enclosure with their English fox-hounds and hunted the half-tame foxes, the servants, ‘to whom the arbitrary ways of English fox-hunters were altogether a novelty’, at once set upon them. It was a case of assault by the officers and counter-assault, without serious injury on either side; and in England, said Blunt, if it had come at all before a bench of magistrates, which is improbable, would have been settled at most by a light fine. In Egypt, however, it was at once made an important political issue. The servants ‘were accordingly, by a summary and irregular process arrested and sent for trial under circumstances so unusual as to amount to intimidation, before a native court’. They were sentenced to imprisonment only, but when they were released it was discovered that they had been subjected illegally to hard blows. The officers were not allowed to be either counter-prosecuted or subjected to the formality of an English court-martial. As there had already been other affairs of similar conflicts between native servants and officers of the garrison that had had similar results, Blunt’s case was regarded by Egyptians as a test case of the way in which English military scandals were hushed up abroad, and ‘of the whole of the relations of native Egypt with the officers and soldiers of the British Army of Occupation’.

On the basis of the imperfect information that came to him in England, Blunt at once opened a correspondence with

Lord Lansdowne, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and wrote letters to the various London papers which 'evoked much public sympathy'. Questions were asked in the House of Commons, eliciting a promise that papers should be laid before Parliament, and after the Blunts had reached Cairo, a Blue Book (Eg. 3, 1901) appeared—one of the most amusing of all Blue Books, Blunt observed with relish in his diary—revealing both 'something of the irregularities which had been practised', and 'the strange discrepancies which existed between the documents of the trial and the account given by the Foreign Office'. It called forth another letter from him to Lord Lansdowne giving the facts which had been 'gradually unravelled with the assistance of the highest legal authorities at Cairo' from Lady Anne's translation of the dossier of the case. Lord Lansdowne, after referring it to Lord Cromer, refused to lay the letter before Parliament.

The case ended with the 'explosion', towards the end of May, of what Blunt called his 'bomb against Cromer': an exposure of 'the systematic interference with the law in Egypt which has come to be an unfortunate feature latterly of Lord Cromer's policy'. Somewhat curtailed it appeared in a prominent place with good comment in most of the London papers, and made, as Blunt remarked, a big noise.

The first years of the century had brought Blunt back also to a not unimportant part in Irish affairs. He was especially useful in smoothing the path of confidential negotiation between the Irish Members of Parliament, particularly John Redmond, and George Wyndham, now Chief Secretary to Ireland. On his return from Egypt in 1903 Blunt learned from Wyndham that after the first reading of his Irish Land Bill a representative member of the old Tory phalanx had been to Arthur Balfour to explain that much of the Bill was difficult to swallow and that the whole thing could only be made palatable if the Irish members would agree that it would end the land quarrel and accept it as a *final* settlement. Wyndham asked Blunt to try to make the Irish leaders under-



stand that the whole cause of Irish land legislation might be wrecked by indiscretion on this particular head. It was like Blunt to accept with some satisfaction the irony of a situation in which George Wyndham, who had repudiated him for his Irish doings in 1888, turned to him for help in Irish policy. He chafed only slightly when Wyndham, somewhat naïvely reversing the roles, began to sing O'Brien's praises to him.

For the next months he was busy going back and forth between the two leaders, Redmond and Wyndham, passing on memoranda and discussing detailed points of the Bill and its amendments. On May 3rd, to his great satisfaction, he arranged a meeting between them in Chapel Street where he had recently taken a house: at the end of three quarters of an hour's discussion they shook hands, and Redmond went away, leaving Wyndham delighted. It had been, Blunt felt, a historic meeting. On May 10th the Bill passed its second reading, but it was to go through many vicissitudes before successfully weathering the third reading towards the end of July. The part that he played in the Irish affairs of that year—repeated, though to a less important extent, two years later—gave him confidence that his 'life had not been quite wasted'.

An Irish matter in which Blunt also became the intermediary two years later was of a different sort: at the request of William Butler Yeats he broached the subject with George Wyndham of a patent for the Abbey Theatre at Dublin and obtained his warm support. Lady Gregory and Yeats had already interested Blunt in their literary movement, urging him to discover some Celtic blood in his veins and come to Ireland to help them in the literary revival. He attended meetings of their society in London and went with enthusiasm to see their plays performed; and he himself had dramatized an episode from the Cuchulain Saga. *Fand of the Fair Cheek*, 'a Féerie in three acts', was finished at Fernycroft in 1902 and privately printed in 1904. Like his other two plays it is written in rhymed Alexandrines whose fluency justifies Blunt's preference for them as a dramatic medium. *Fand* is the best

of the three. The truly human robustness with which fairies and heroes disport themselves in an exotic setting harks back partly to the Celtic source of the piece and partly to the Arabic literature in which Blunt was steeped and which seemed to him akin to the Irish sagas.

To Blunt's great pleasure both Lady Gregory and Yeats, of whose critical judgment he had the highest opinion, praised *Fand* warmly. They told him that the Abbey Theatre intended putting it on. Three years passed and he had given up all thought of this when, one April evening in 1907, on opening the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he saw, to his astonishment, an announcement in large type of *Fand* having been performed at the Abbey Theatre with great success. 'It is only in Ireland, I suppose,' he observed, 'that a play could be performed for the first time and the author know nothing about it.'

In 1903 Blunt finished and published his poetic version of Lady Anne's skilful translation of *The Moallakat* or *The Seven Golden Odes of Arabia*, dedicating it 'to Frederick York Powell in token of an old friendship and of much oriental sympathy.'<sup>3</sup> His preface provides the reader with a background for understanding the 'Poets of the Ignorance', of the days before Islam lighted the minds of men. They were superb boasters, naïve and passionate—and wise with the wisdom of Zoheyr in the last verses of his ode. Blunt has succeeded in rendering something of their 'stupendous hedonism' and 'splendid realism' and also of the grandeur and cadence of Arabic verse.

Cloud-wrecked lay the valley piled with the load of it,  
high as in sacks the Yemami heapeth his corn-measures.  
Seemed it then the song-birds, wine-drunk at sun-rising,  
loud through the valley shouted, maddened with  
spiceries,  
While the wild beast corpses, grouped like great bulbs up-  
torn,  
cumbered the hollow places, drowned in the night-  
trouble,

During the early years of the century Blunt wrote a certain amount of literary criticism—and gathered materials for his ‘horse book’. Assisted by Cockerell, he worked over the manuscript of his brother-in-law’s *Astarte*. He approved of its publication although he found the Byron papers, on which it is based, ‘a ghastly record’, and tried vainly to persuade Lord Lovelace to mitigate his charges against Byron’s publisher, John Murray. A little later he began a piece of writing upon which, as upon so many others, he worked intermittently for the rest of his life but never finished. The plan of expounding his own philosophy of life was suggested to him by a book on Buddhism of Lafcadio Hearn’s in which he became interested on a visit to the Duke and Duchess of Aosta at Turin. He called his book *The Religion of Happiness*—‘happiness needs to be learned’, he said—and intended it to be the most important of his writings and the quintessence of his autobiography.

He completed and privately printed his memoirs of the last years of the nineteenth century, published much later as the first volume of *My Diaries*. And, with Sheykh Mohammed Abdu’s help, he finished *The Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* to which he had devoted himself, at Abdu’s suggestion, after an Arabic newspaper in Egypt published ‘a fantastic account’ of his life and doings. And he enjoyed the task: ‘There is nothing really so comic as history for those who live to see both ends of the joke’.

During 1904 he was engaged upon a voluminous correspondence in the *Daily Chronicle* about the well-water on the part of his estate lying in East Grinstead, and, more important, upon arranging for the settlement of Crabbet Park on his daughter. He ‘ended his reign’, as he put it, ‘after thirty-two years and a half of it’ in order to evade the death duties because he felt that he could hardly live long. The Lordship of the Manors of Worth and Oram, with Worth Forest, Springfield and Newbuildings, he retained.

Altogether Blunt did an astonishing amount of work at

this time when he was physically far from fit and the illness was developing from which he never really recovered. In December, 1904, at Sheykh Obeyd, an attack of fever affected his lungs and kidneys, and left him feeling twenty years older. It was accompanied by 'violent depression' that reached its climax when he learned that the pretty young Bedouin wife and three small children of one of his Arabs had died of smallpox. Their Arab relations were too terrified of the disease to tend them; had he been well, he thought, he might have saved them.

Occasionally he was able to sit for an hour with Sheykh Mohammed Abdu in the Mufti's garden. Mohammed Abdu had been given in 1897 an acre of the land of Sheykh Obeyd on which he built a country house where he lived during the winter. 'I know no society', Blunt wrote in his diary at this time, 'so pleasant as his nor so improving. It is all the society we have here as we see nothing of Europeans'. They were 'in a kind of Coventry' with the English officials because of the fox-hunting case and Blunt's attacks on Cromer.

By the end of January he was able to make a short desert journey with his son-in-law Neville Lytton, to take provisions to his bereaved Arab. But soon he was laid up again with 'malarious fever' and felt, he observed, like a hare headed first by one greyhound and then by another. A week afterwards he left Sheykh Obeyd as it seemed to him for ever.

The journey to England was 'a terrible experience of fever and pain'. The English doctor at Venice warned him that to attempt to go farther would mean that he would die in the train, and put him on a diet of no food, only Vichy water with a teaspoon of brandy in it twice a day. The régime of starvation reduced him to such weakness that he could not move and began to have visions. Fortunately his old ally, Button Bourke, was living in Venice. Cockerell sped to him there. Between them they managed to get him to England by mid-April where he was pronounced to have Malta fever.

He describes the next hideous weeks in his published

diaries: 'I had hardly got down to Newbuildings when I began to be seized with a pain in the nape of my neck, which gradually increased in violence till it became a perpetual agony, preventing me from taking any rest whatever either day or night . . . I had a bed made up for me in the hall, but could not actually lie down on it, and remained day and night propped up, my forehead resting on a band fastened to the bed-head against which I leaned it, or I would wander from room to room and from chair to chair on the ground floor, followed by my nurse.' As part of the whole nightmare came the news that Mohammed Abdu had died—'a terrible personal loss to me and a public one quite incalculable for the world of Islam'.

Once more Blunt's life was despaired of. Nevertheless he did not die, 'though emerging as one who had passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death'. The fever, it was found, had affected his spine and he was to remain on his back in bed for at least three months.

The devotion of his friends during these months was a happiness to him. When he was able to go to London they visited him constantly at his house in Chapel Street and he called on them in a wheeled chair. At the end of the year he noted in his journal: 'During the last six weeks in London I have seen more friends, and more of them than in the preceding six years. I have ceased to worry myself about public affairs. I shall never, now the Mufti is dead, go again to Egypt, nor even, I think, cross the Channel. If I recover I mean to live out my few remaining years as much as possible with my friends here in England, and enjoy the little things of life at home. My friends . . . now, I perceive, look on me as wise. It is all old age can reasonably aspire to in the way of happiness.'

THE SECRET HISTORY SERIES  
AND COLLECTED POEMS

## I

THE year 1905, as Blunt had foreseen, was the last in which he spent so much as a day away from England. Illness and increasing age robbed travel of most of its pleasure. Three years later he fell desperately ill again. His throat was declared tubercular and again he was threatened with death if he would not undergo an operation. With an aversion to surgery, owing in part to fatalism, in part to fastidious taste, he preferred to risk death. The crisis passed, though the disease continued its hold and obliged him to live henceforth the regimented life of an invalid.

Lady Gregory said that Blunt needed politics and hunting for excitement, but after these successive illnesses, though he still drove his Arabs, and occasionally rode them, his sport often was restricted to shooting from his wheeled chair, and his political activity to the written word and discussions with his visitors. Fortunately he had many diversions unconnected with either sport or politics. He read enormously, chiefly at night, never failing to set down his opinions when he took up his diary in the very early morning. He had always been interested in painting and was something of a theatre-goer. In all the arts his taste was catholic; his judgment, naturally, was limited by the conventions in matters of form and 'truth to life' of his own generation. Tolstoy's two great novels seemed to him 'probably the greatest novels ever written' because, like the *Decameron* (to Blunt the first of all prose works of fiction) they showed 'human nature precisely as it is

to-day and was yesterday and ever will be'. Meredith's novels, on the other hand, bored him because the characters, especially the women, conveyed no sense of reality. Although he heartily damned George Moore's *Vale* as exemplifying 'bad art' at its worst, he was honest enough to admit admiration for Moore's *Memoirs of My Dead Life*: 'it is a book crapulous to the last degree, but interesting because of its fidelity to the facts of the period described and for its high literary quality. I saw enough of the Bohemian world at Paris in my youth to recognize the truth of Moore's presentment of it and no English writer has ever evolved a better narrative style. The characters are alive and real and nothing is shirked in the telling.'

Rarely, however, did the exponents of the new tendencies in art so far escape excoriation. Where there was apparently an entire break with tradition Blunt could find nothing good. The great French post-impressionist exhibition of 1910 in London was either 'an extremely bad joke or a swindle'. He was inclined to think the latter, for there was no trace of humour in it. The Futurist exhibition of the following year he dismissed as 'mere nonsense, the sort of things a child might make by pasting strips of coloured paper together as patchwork'. For contemporary painting he needed a new orientation for which he had neither inclination nor youthful adaptability.

By the theatre he was less put to it. It demanded little mental readjustment. Experiments at the Théâtre Antoine in Paris interested him. Gilbert Murray's translation of the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, with its echoes of Swinburne and Tennyson, swept him off his feet: 'At the end of it we were all moved to tears, and I got up and did what I never did before in a theatre, shouted for the author, whether for Euripides or Gilbert Murray I hardly knew'. Bernard Shaw's comedies delighted him.

Blunt met Shaw first when Neville Lytton was painting his portrait—in papal robes since Shaw's features resembled those of Velasquez's Pope Innocent X<sup>1</sup>—and at once appreciated

him at full value. He was by no means convinced that Shaw always knew what he was talking about, and he regarded Shaw's Fabianism as 'socialism without the few humanitarian virtues which commonly go with it, without romance and without honesty of principle, only opportunism'. None the less, he had an admiration for Shaw equalling, he observed, Shaw's own. Wit, at least in the English tongue, began with Shaw. Shaw, moreover, fought brilliantly and without fear for many of the causes which Blunt himself upheld. They shared a common hatred of injustice and hypocrisy.

This same hatred, diluted and in a different form, created a certain sympathy also between Blunt and Francis Thompson whom Wilfrid Meynell had brought for a few hours' visit to Newbuildings towards the end of the century. In 1911 he came again, emaciated and helpless, to spend some weeks in one of Blunt's cottages near Newbuildings. Every day Thompson was driven over to lunch in the Jubilee Garden and to lie through the afternoon sleeping or pretending to read, often with his book upside down. Blunt described him later with sympathy and inimitable art: 'As he moved among us, or lay silent in his dreams his face might have been that of some Spanish saint of the days of Isabel the Catholic, tortured to inanition by his own austerities; or again it might, so small it was, have been that of a prematurely aged and dying child.' Sometimes he would talk to Blunt of his life and his poetry. As the weeks passed he grew feebler, and during the last fortnight of his stay, in October, 'gave himself up entirely to laudanum'. A month later, in London, he died and, at Wilfrid Meynell's request, Blunt wrote a memorial of him published first in the *Academy*, and later as a pamphlet, relating what he had learned from the poet about his life. It is one of the few examples of highly wrought prose written by Blunt, and is admirably suited to its subject and occasion.

In 1911 Wilfrid Meynell had established himself and his family at Greatham, within easy distance of Newbuildings. Henceforth he was often a visitor there; and Blunt



sometimes drove four-in-hand to Greatham to see him. A more constant visitor to Newbuildings was Hilaire Belloc who had moved in 1902 to Shipley, only a couple of miles away. His paradoxical mind, clever talk and many enthusiasms entertained Blunt. When he proposed starting a paper, the *Eye Witness*, Blunt encouraged him, as he did in regard to most of his projects, and contributed to the first number the prophetic 'Coronation Ode, 1911', calling on Man to denounce, in the day of her rejoicing, England's betrayal of her ancient name of Liberty.

Somewhat later another new acquaintance who became a valued friend bicycled up to Newbuildings—Lord Osborne Beauclerk, later Duke of St. Albans, quite the most sympathetic young man Blunt had met for a long time. 'He is hardly at all educated,' remarked Blunt, 'but has a large experience of men and cities, or rather of wild places which are not cities. He has been at Eton and understands its snobbery; he has been in the Army and understands its futility; he is a landlord and understands its duties; he is without pretension and has a kindly heart.'

Blunt began, too, to see much of Winston Churchill, who had married Clementine, the daughter of his old friend, Lady Blanche Hozier. He hoped that he might influence Churchill's political views as he had Lord Randolph's, pressing him even towards certain domestic as well as foreign reforms; in 1910, at Winston Churchill's request, he sent to him at the Home Office, a memorandum on Prison Reform, founded on his own experience.<sup>2</sup> He delighted in Churchill's quick grasp and turn of political subjects. 'He has just his father's talent of seizing the points of a situation and driving them home in his replies. He fills me with admiration and delight.'

Apart from friends a remarkable variety of casual visitors came to Newbuildings: Turks, Poles, Russians, Americans, to inspect the Arab stud; travellers setting out to Persia and Persians themselves to seek advice; Indian leaders and zealous young Nationalists, 'a quite black West African from Sierra

Leone', and of course, Egyptians, to discuss their 'Movements' with Blunt. Besides, there were English visitors by the score, unconnected with either politics or Arabian horses: Cecil Sharp, collector of folk songs, with whom Blunt went 'to see old Jupp at Carpenters' making him sing his Bristol song and 'the Fisherman', 'of which last', Blunt wrote, 'I took down words'; Father Richard de Bary, who had been Father Angelo, a Capuchin Modernist at Crawley, and was now the Anglican Priest at the Shaftesburys; A. E. Housman, the Cambridge Professor of Latin and author of *A Shropshire Lad*, who had a 'disconcerting way of refusing to smile' when anything funny was said, even when he saw the joke—'I suppose dons are like that', remarked Blunt.

Perhaps the high conversational point of these years was the week-end in 1912 when George Wyndham, the Churchills and Mark Napier assembled to celebrate with Blunt the completion of the new Manor House that he had built in Worth Forest—

I love the Forest; 'tis but this one strip  
Along the watershed that still dares keep  
Its title to such name. Yet once wide grown  
A mighty woodland stretched from Down to Down,  
The last stronghold and desperate standing-place  
Of that indigenous Britannic race  
Which fell before the English.

Blunt's diary for the nineteenth of October reads: 'This has been a great day. Mark arrived at ten in glorious sunshine, and we made a long beat for deer in the Upper Forest without result, however, as far as getting a buck was concerned, though we flushed several woodcocks'. When Churchill arrived he at once began a political discussion which went on with only occasional breaks through dinner and till midnight. 'It was a fine night, and we dined in the bungalow, dressed in gorgeous Oriental garments, Clementine in a suit of embroidered silk, purchased last year in Smyrna, Winston in one of my Bagdad robes, George in a blue dressing-gown, and I in my Bedouin

clothes, Mark adorned only with his wit, but that was of the best. It recalled the most glorious night's entertainment of the Crabbet Club, a true feast of reason and flow of bowl. The secrets of the Cabinet were gloriously divulged; and those of the Opposition front benches no less, from Home Rule to a reconstruction of the House of Lords by common accord after George Curzon and Asquith had been got rid of, while George Wyndham declared with great oaths that he would rather go to hell than see the British Constitution made ridiculous by Single Chamber Government, at which point I left them for my bed. Winston was very brilliant in all this, as though he kept on at the Madeira he also kept his head, and played with George's wild rushes like a skilled fencer with a greatly superior fence. He is certainly an astonishing young man'.

Another day of excellent talk followed. The week-end went off with a flash that justified its careful staging, but left Blunt with the remorseful feeling an orgy always left, increased the next day by news of the Turkish defeat at Adrianople, a defeat for Islam: 'I feel ashamed of having had that uproarious time with Winston and George, two outrageous political gamblers, just now at this tragic time when we ought all to be in sack-cloth and ashes'.

## 2

Blunt seldom had to reproach himself for not responding fully to Moslem disasters. The indictments of imperial oppression—in books, pamphlets, letters—published by this 'Scourge of the Oppressor' during these years fill four volumes and, if the shorter writings were brought together, would easily fill five. In 1906, his Egyptian, Indian and Irish memoirs were privately printed. A year later Fisher Unwin agreed to publish the first volume, the Egyptian. Its appearance in June brought much commendation and it was translated and published in France during that same year; but it

was the occasion also of many attacks. Perhaps the most scurrilous, certainly one of the most indefensible, ending in the severance of Blunt's 'epistolary connection', with *The Times* 'at least in its present phase of existence', was a letter published in *The Times* signed 'Once a Twenty Years' Resident in Egypt'—a pseudonym often used by Moberly Bell, then manager of *The Times*.

Two years later *India Under Ripon* was published. Blunt confided in a friend that he wanted to add to it some chapters about the India of 1909 but had been unable to get a publisher so much as to look at them, so it appeared 'a wasp without its sting'. He was, however, getting very tired of controversies, though the fighting, as he remarked, always did him good.

No visible weariness certainly appeared in the zeal with which he fought; and, in 1910, he published *Gordon at Khartoum*. 'I have been reading *Gordon at Khartoum*,' Lady Gregory wrote him some months later, 'and you may imagine how it recalled those days and almost rekindled the fire of indignation and enthusiasm. But not quite, for so many who vexed one are gone . . . and one can't feel anger or triumph in a graveyard'. There were those, nevertheless, who felt much anger on reading it. Outraged Major-Generals, who considered that a passage in it vilified the British Army, gobbled in angry letters to the *Pall Mall Gazette* and to Blunt himself, threatening to memorialize the Lord Chancellor with a view to depriving Blunt of his functions as justice of peace in the county of Sussex. They failed to enquire whether Blunt had any such functions. In the debate on the book in the House of Commons, the representative of the War Office made a like effort to have Blunt deprived of dignities that he had never held. It was all very absurd—a Gilbert and Sullivan episode—and much relished by the victim, who printed a reply two days later in the morning papers. 'The gallant Generals,' he wrote happily in his journal, 'are more angry than ever at having made fools of themselves, and there is talk of their getting the law

strengthened, so as to prevent criticism of the Army.' As is usual in such cases, the book sold extremely well.

Toward the end of 1912, at a very opportune moment, when the Home Rule Campaign was once more in full swing, *The Land War in Ireland* was published and much more quietly, but well received.<sup>3</sup> 'It is probably the last prose work I shall publish,' Blunt wrote, 'though there may be more than one posthumous volume of my dairies'—a not quite accurate prophecy, for in 1919 and 1920 were published the two volumes entitled *My Diaries*, of the first of which he had finished a preliminary draft in 1904.

Aside from these four volumes, he put out also during these years a multitude of political pamphlets and letters. In 1906 occurred the first of the series of blunders that he recorded against Sir Edward Grey, then Foreign Secretary: Great Britain's claim to the whole Sinai peninsula including Akabah, a claim made in the name of the Khedive and caused by Lord Cromer's and the British Government's suspicion that the Sultan backed by Germany intended building a railway from Maan through Akabah. No sooner did Blunt learn of the crisis than he advised John Redmond how to obtain the information necessary to expose in Parliament the error of Grey's attitude, and he sent a letter to the King and to Grey explaining the weakness of the British position. An epitome of the letter appeared in the newspapers, but too late to have any effect. Great Britain gained a victory—most unfortunately, as Blunt pointed out, since it entrenched Germany in, and further ousted England from, the position of counsellor to the Ottoman Empire.

Meantime Lord Cromer's 'official report' had been published, drawing from Blunt a long article in the *Manchester Guardian* condemning Cromer's political as opposed to his administrative policy in Egypt, explaining his relations with the Khedive and blaming his quarrel with the Sultan. In an accompanying leader the *Manchester Guardian* upheld Blunt; as it continued for some time to uphold him; but the other

papers were 'extravagantly jingo'. A few weeks later Blunt's criticism of Cromer's administration seemed justified: the villagers of Denshawai objected to their tame pigeons being shot by seven officers of the Army of Occupation, a quarrel ensued, a woman and some men were killed or wounded, and the officers were belaboured with *nabuts*, and later one of them who had run to bring help from their camp was found dead four miles from Denshawai—killed, it was alleged at the time, by the villagers, but afterwards pronounced overcome by heat and sun; four of the villagers were hanged, four condemned to penal servitude for life, and others to imprisonment—a sentence later commuted—for terms of varying length.

Blunt set to work at once, encouraging opposition to what he foresaw from the beginning would be a monstrous sentence.<sup>4</sup> The affair weighed on him 'like a nightmare'. Worse still, no sooner had the sentence been declared than Cromer was given the Order of Merit. Blunt fulminated: 'What a state of things! Here we have a judicial crime of the largest dimensions committed by our representative in Egypt, the thing hardly denied, quite undeniable and defaming the fair face of English justice throughout the world, yet on the very day the hangings take place our Representative is honoured with the supreme reward of the Order of Merit!' He was somewhat consoled by the conviction that Cromer could not long survive the blow that the patent injustice of the Denshawai affair had dealt his reputation.

During two months, with Lady Anne's help, he compiled an article entitled 'Atrocities of Justice under British Rule in Egypt'. In it the Government was pilloried for its duplicity and Sir Edward Grey for his weakness in concealing the truth in official reports to Parliament of the Denshawai trial and executions. Above all it was a scorching denunciation of Lord Cromer. Six months passed. Then one April afternoon in 1907, as Blunt was fast asleep before dinner, after a day spent in writing for the *Daily News*, at the paper's request, an article on Cromer's annual report, a telegram arrived from Meynell.

It announced the long-awaited tidings: Cromer had resigned. Full awake at once and laughing so that the bed shook under him, Blunt sent back the wire, 'Who-Whoop!'

When the *Manchester Guardian* published his programme for a new Egyptian policy a fortnight later with an approving leader, Blunt's spirits rose high: 'Things look more favourable for liberty on the Nile than has been the case for twenty years'. He was encouraged to start on a period that lasted for several years of intensive work for Islam and particularly for Egyptian Nationalism. During this time he received visits from leaders and members of the Nationalist Party: wrote effective articles on 'the New Situation in Egypt' and 'the Fiasco in Egypt' and manifestoes that were read and much applauded at the first meetings of the quite ineffective National Egyptian Congress, of which, at its second gathering, he was made Honorary President; he also financed the publication in 1910 of *Egypt's Ruin* by Theodore Rothstein and contributed a preface to it.<sup>5</sup>

## 3

For some time Blunt had thought that English and European machinations in the East and in Africa were leading inevitably toward a general smash-up. By July, 1911, a European war appeared imminent: if it did not break out at once it would be only because England was not economically prepared or because Germany was not ready for a naval war. And though he felt war to be impossible for England, as she had no supply of food in store—even a belief in war would ruin her—he took his precautions. He buried £500 in gold in a box under the only sycamore-tree in a fir wood. Two days elapsed, and he returned to make sure that the gold had not been disturbed. Digging down to the box, only a few inches below the surface, he found to his astonishment a toad seated on top of it—the medieval suggestion pleased him.

In England there were strikes, in France bread riots, and

in Germany warlike talk about Morocco. To complicate matters, at the end of 1911, Italy invaded Tripoli, declaring war on Turkey. Word came that on the pretext that the Arab inhabitants of the palm groves behind the town of Tripoli joined the Turkish Army in its attack on the Italian troops, the whole native population, men, women, and children had been exterminated, to the number, report went, of 4,000 persons. It was the sort of barbarity that pricked Blunt most sharply. When the editor Stead asked him to attend a meeting of protest he took occasion to publish his reply to Stead as part of a pamphlet—'The Italian Horror and How to End It.' The only way to end the Italian atrocities, Blunt declared, was for a power stronger than Italy, capable of taking effective action against her, to intervene. For many reasons England was logically that power. Blunt urged the meeting therefore, by pressing for a clear statement of their attitude towards the aggression, to force the Foreign Office to intervene. Sir Edward Grey's weakness in regard to the invasion marked, he thought, a step on the road leading England, and Europe, into war.

It seemed impossible to Blunt to condemn sufficiently Sir Edward Grey's blunders during the past five years—he called them blunders, not acts attended by foreseen results, because Sir Edward, 'a worthy English country Gentleman of old-fashioned Whig opinions', was 'neither brutal by nature nor callous, but . . . singularly ignorant of any country but his own, and . . . entirely without imagination, and woefully ill-advised by his subordinates'. The blunders, nevertheless, appeared to be disastrous. They had led to so parlous a situation in the East, Blunt realized, that even the break up of the British Empire, which had bred and would continue to breed war, might no longer bring peace. Yet for the honour of England and as the only chance of peace, slender though it was, the Empire must go. Even for that purpose a general European conflict, possibly involving the annihilation of England itself, could not be contemplated calmly by Blunt,



who, as has been pointed out, was anti-Imperialist largely because he was passionately English.

His political work during these and the two following years, directed toward obtaining a just settlement of Imperial difficulties in order to mitigate the causes of war, was attended with little success. Its usual medium was a monthly newspaper called *Egypt*, started in February, 1911, by a committee of English 'radicals' of which Blunt was chairman, edited by an intelligent young Irishman, Frederick Ryan, under Blunt's direction. It was made up mainly of articles written by Blunt himself under the pseudonyms 'ex-Diplomaticus' and 'Capablanca'—articles filled with warnings and taunts of 'I told you so', strident and windy but often in the right. After a career of little over a year the paper was forbidden circulation at Cairo on the ground that it disturbed public order. Blunt protested loudly in letters to *The Times* and to Sir Edward Grey, and primed John Dillon to put questions in Parliament. And he went on for many months publishing and somehow disseminating the paper until the death of Ryan, the editor, made its continuance seem too difficult. Its discontinuance in February, 1913, brought Blunt from both Egypt and India many messages of gratitude for the services that he had rendered to Islam by publishing 'the truth'.

## 4

Occasionally during the past few years it had seemed to Blunt that there was hope of his political dreams for the Moslem world becoming reality; then again he felt, 'I am sick of Eastern politics and intend to take no part in them when this Tripoli business is over. . . . It is thirty years since I began to battle. I feel inclined to say with Pitt: "Roll up the map of Islam".' Personally, as well as politically, there is a new tone of despondency in his diary. The entry, written with conviction, on the last day of 1909, runs: 'As to my own life

I feel that I have come at last to its watershed, and that whatever happens henceforth can only be on the downward slope, not without its little pleasures perhaps, but still with no probability of again ascending'. At the end of 1911, disheartened not only by the 'Tripoli business' but by a year in which he had been ill and lonely, he wrote, 'I am old and weary, and discouraged, and would if I could slink out of the fight. I am useless in face of an entirely hostile world'. With the outbreak of the Balkan War he feared that Islam would never be regenerated, that his work of thirty years had been absolutely thrown away. His ideals had not been false, but the men in whose hands the issues lay had been 'unworthy and unwise'—

And there is found no hand to ward or keep  
The weak from wrong, and Pity is asleep.

He was left a solitary figure, pleading the lost cause among Englishmen of conservative nationalism.

The old longing recurred for peace in retirement; the old love of his own countryside drew him back there. In 1912 he determined to retire altogether from the world to his 'hermitage in Sussex'.

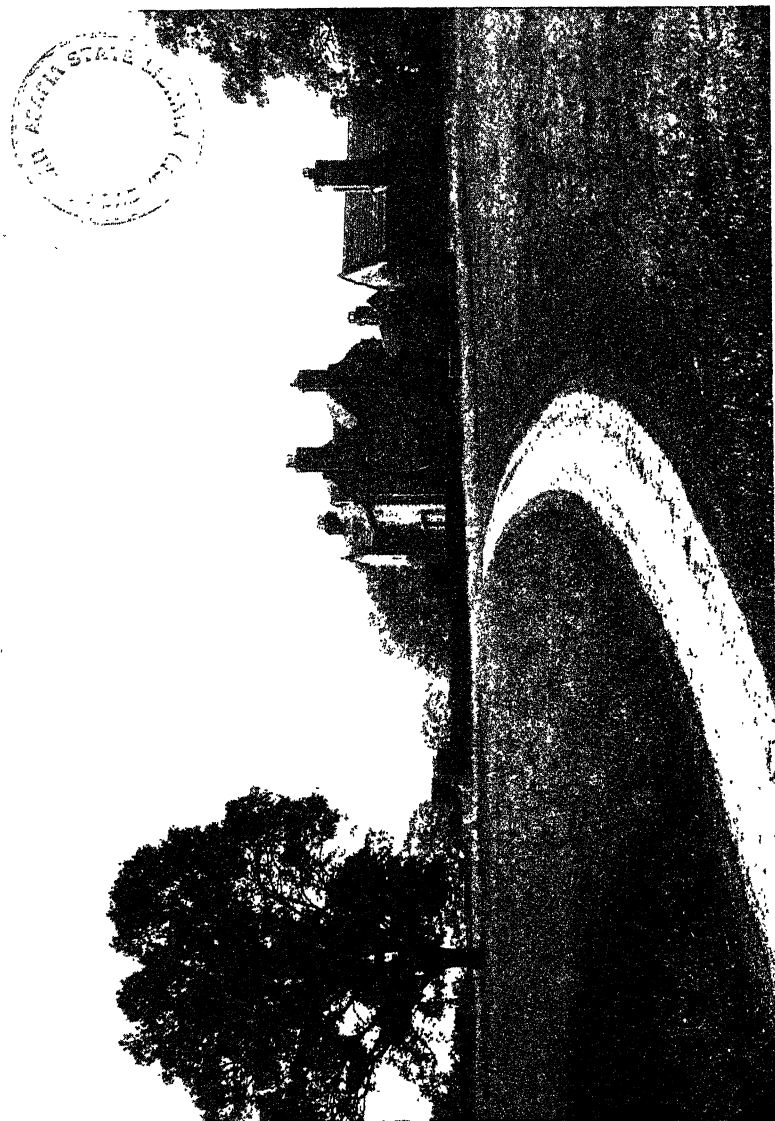
My choice it is, and pride,  
On my own lands to find my sport,  
In my own fields to ride.

He had lost his taste for the activity of London. Life and manners had changed and though a certain mellowness tempered his judgment of them, they bewildered him. Of almost the last large party that he went to at Strafford House he wrote: 'An amusing evening, as evenings there always are, and where I met a number of ancient friends, ex-beauties, and others who seemed pleased to see me. . . . At a certain stage in the evening, after much loud comic singing, the guests sat down in a circle on the ground, and certain performers from Paris danced the *Danses des Apaches*, which is the same which used to be called the *Cancan*, with other gymnastic eccentricities

formerly confined to the Jardin Mabille, for our amusement; an astonishing display, which would have shocked us, I think, even at the Mabille, in the days of the Second Empire, and would certainly have been impossible in London in my young days at a public dancing-hall, let alone in a drawing-room, but which now delighted us all without a suspicion of indecorum, young men and maidens applauding unrestrainedly, for of such is our new kingdom of Heaven. It is not for me to find fault, and I suppose we enjoy our lives more.'

So Blunt gave up his house in Chapel Street and took his name off his clubs. He would submit to no persuasion. Never for a single day did he go up again to London. But retirement, the freedom of his estates and such new amusements as printing his own and others' verses on the small press that he had established at Newbuildings, did not bring peace. 'A black melancholy is on me,' he wrote, 'caused by my failure everywhere in life. My poetry, my Eastern politics, my Arab horse-breeding, were strings to my bow and they have one after another snapped, and to-day looking through my memoirs I perceive how slackly they are written and how unworthy they are of survival. Yet the diaries are full of things too important for me to destroy and they overwhelm me with despair.' That was the reverse of the medal; on the other side were messages of admiration, respect, affection—a letter from George Wyndham, announcing his son Percy's engagement: 'I write at once to you because you and one other are near to me in all that really touches my life. I am determined to be your guest with luck when the birds are in chorus, and in any case, when the wild roses bloom.' On the following day a letter from Benares ran: 'You say your advocacy has ceased to exercise any influence even on Mohammedans. I say it has just begun. They now realize the true meaning of what you told them years ago, because they are shaking off a bit of their slavishness, developed since the mutiny of 1857. Your articles in *Egypt* are widely read here. They are translated and reproduced in the vernacular papers.'

NEW BUILDINGS PLACE





Neither approbation nor affection could cheer him. He had reached that poignant state of mind for which there is no remedy, when life must be, and is carried on to all appearance as before, but with a constant underlying sense of frustration and of failure. It is neither a mood of depression nor a temporary recognition of futility. Life has been reckoned up and the discrepancy between ambition and accomplishment has been realized. Only those who are most sensitive and who have struggled towards a standard of life higher than that accepted by their peers are either compelled or able to face such a reckoning. Others have not dreamed dreams of quite so fine a texture, nor striven for a goal so distant or so high; nor do others measure quite so closely achievement with ideal.

Such inner despair seems to stand apart from special circumstances—even the happiness of friendship and love seems unable to affect it. Yet fresh trouble has power to make it deeper. Suddenly, on June 10th, 1913, came news of the death of George Wyndham, 'my nearest male relation and very much my nearest friend'. It was a blow that struck to the inmost fibres of his heart, bewildering in its unexpectedness, and touching him on every side of his existence. 'I had looked upon him,' he wrote later, 'as the inheritor after me of our family traditions, and in some measure of my family possessions as trustee and knowing all. No thought had ever crossed my mind that I could have the misfortune to survive him.' The loss was one that could not well be measured.

## 5

The year after George Wyndham's death was the nadir of Blunt's personal disillusionment. His mood is expressed in his diary on December 31st: 'I am alone just now here and in this dark world I am overwhelmed with woe. I see myself as one sees the dead, a thing finished which has lost all its importance,

whatever it once had in the world. I realize how little I have accomplished, how little I have affected the thought of my generation in spite, as I am still convinced, of the soundness of my view of things, and of some skill and courage in expounding it. I have made almost no converts in Europe, and am without a single disciple at home to continue my teaching after I am dead. Even in the East, though my ideas are bearing fruit and will one day be justified in act, I have founded no personal school where my name has authority. The consciousness that it is so wounds me with a sense of failure and I despise myself the more for feeling it as strongly as I do. 'Why should I mind? I ask myself, and I find no answer.'

His pride forced him to carry on life as usual. Gradually he achieved a new detachment and in poetry at least was encouraged to think that he might leave a mark on the world by something that happened early in 1914: Yeats, with whom he was already well acquainted, Ezra Pound and Frederic Manning proposed to give a dinner in honour of Blunt as a poet. Blunt did not feel the honour altogether undeserved: he believed his verse to be good—'or', he said, 'I should burn it, also I have always held it as certain that good poetry will sooner or later find its level and that if it remains unknown it is because it deserves obscurity'. Nevertheless, he was surprised, since he had published no verse for twelve years—and he was touched. He suggested that the eight poets who were to be present at the dinner should come to Newbuildings instead of his going to them, and the date was set for January 18th.<sup>6</sup>

As the day approached Blunt was filled with trepidation, allayed only partially by Lord Osborne Beauclerk's coming to support him through the ordeal; and on the arrival of the poets, owing in part to Blunt's shyness and in part to his bewilderment over the whole affair, it required some time to break the ice. A peacock, by Yeats's request, was served up in full plumage on the table, and they all ate two helpings of it and

some a helping of roast beef besides, and there was good discussion of the arts of versification afterwards on a plane much above his comprehension, he avowed, for several of the young men were 'futurists' and believed that verse should be written without metre, rhyme or scansion, a region where he was unable to follow. Ezra Pound read an address:

Because you have gone your individual gait,  
Written fine verses, made mock of the world,  
Swung the grand style, not made a trade of art,  
Upheld Mazzini and detested institutions

We who are little given to respect,  
Respect you, and having no better way to show it,  
Bring you this stone to be some record of it.

The stone was a small marble box fashioned like an Egyptian sepulchre with 'a terribly paulo-post-futurist' bas-relief engraved on it, by Gaudier-Brzeska, which, wrote its astonished recipient, he had been obliged to turn with its face to the wall. Within the casket each poet had placed a copy of one of his works.

'I hope,' remarked Blunt afterwards, 'I hope what I said on the occasion was not too absurd. But I really did not understand the address they read me or perceive till afterwards that they had confused Arabi with Mazzini in it, and I was afraid of committing myself in my reply to anything serious. It did very well at the moment.' After lunch he read them a clever translation that he had made of 'Don Juan's Good Night' by his friend Count Gobineau—somewhat needlessly prefacing it by the observation that he hoped the poets would not be shocked.<sup>7</sup>

The occasion was noticed in the Press and the poets encountered some odium for their ovation to a character so iniquitous according to conservative opinion as Wilfrid Blunt. 'A man at the F.O.,' wrote one of them, '... says he will "never speak to any of those poets again".' But the dinner had been



a success. The poets 'all were delighted with Blunt'; and of them Blunt wrote, 'they were really capital fellows, with wit and intelligence'.

In the late spring Pound and Aldington paid him another visit. They amused him in spite of their divergence from him in literary ideals, and were, he thought, themselves amused. 'I am trying to persuade them both into some kind of sanity. I always think that in verse, or for the matter of that, in prose, the more unconventional the subject the more elaborately careful should be the style. Where there is neither decency nor art, which seemed to be the cubist ideal, verse is mere outrage.' Along with the other Georgians, 'the cubists' in his opinion lacked not only the technique which they professed to despise, but knowledge of life to give substance to verse. The force which their work gained later was 'the force of ugliness' learned from 'the degraded trench war of the day' and did not improve it since 'ugliness and cacophany will not live in poetry'. He admitted that Rupert Brooke 'certainly had the making of a poet as poetry was understood twenty years earlier'; Lady Margaret Sackville's verse he liked; his daughter's book of verse reminiscent of his own, *Love in a Mist*, published in 1913, he naturally thought very good, though less good than her prose volume published two years earlier on *Toy Dogs and Their Ancestry*. But even Masfield, whose *Salt Water Ballads* and *The Everlasting Mercy* put him first among poets of his generation, would never do any perfect work.

Of the poets of his own generation who were still living he thought no better. The poetry of C. M. Doughty with whom he kept up an occasional exchange of notes and whose *Arabia Deserta* he had been among the first to welcome, introducing it to Morris and Burne-Jones, he considered the worst, as his prose is the best of the nineteenth century. In Hardy's *Dynasts* he found nothing that had any business to be called poetry. Robert Bridges's work he cared for not at all.

His own poetry he had intended to leave in the hands of Lady Gregory and George Wyndham, his literary executors,

After George Wyndham's death Lady Gregory suggested that Blunt himself should arrange for the publication of as much of his work as he wished ever to be given to the public. To this he agreed, stipulating only that his longer political and philosophical poems should not be excluded. They were as much a part of himself and of his view of things as were the *Sonnets of Proteus*; and if, he added, 'my poetry has any value I feel it lies in its sincerity, for I have really never written any verse for writing's sake only as a way of expressing myself, and I have felt as deeply and strongly about certain aspects of what are called world politics as I have about love. My poetry has been my justification in both fields of my active life, not the pursuit of an art for art's sake'.

Contrary to Blunt's expectation, Macmillan agreed to the complete edition and by the end of June, 1914, it was ready to appear in two volumes. But for some reason, and a little to Blunt's relief as he was absorbed in writing *The Religion of Happiness*, publication was put off by Macmillan till the end of October. Though by that time the Great War had broken out the collection received a good deal of attention. When notices were hostile it was on political rather than literary grounds. Blunt was content. Behind his poetry lay the philosophy of life drawn from wide experience, which he regarded as the *sine qua non*, and he had worked hard at poetic technique, 'harder perhaps than any of my contemporaries'. So the two volumes contained enough good poetry he felt—and rightly—to bear comparison with most Victorian work and might find a permanent place as a quarry wherein anthologists would dig which 'is all the immortality poets can hope for'.

A certain amount of hitherto unpublished work was included in the edition. The four 'Paraphrases From the French', pointed records of human folly and cruelty, and many of the 'Later Sonnets' and 'Later Lyrics', notably the acrostics in which the first letters of the lines spell the name of the person to whom the poem was written, appear for the first time. The 'Quatrains of Life' is made up of the 'Quatrains of Youth',

published by Henley and George Wyndham in 1898, in which the poet answers the question 'what has my youth been that I love thus?' and a new series of quatrains in which he asks 'what has my life been?' and replies:

Nay, my life is good.  
Dear life, I love thee, now thou art subdued.  
Thou hast fled the battle, cast thine arms away,  
And so art victor of the multitude.

Thou art forgotten wholly of thy foes,  
Of thy friends wholly, these alike with those.  
One garden of the world thy kingdom is  
Walled from the wicked, and there blooms thy rose.

At the end of the collection, a fitting close to his poetic work, stands 'The Wisdom of Merlyn', begun during the summer after his Irish imprisonment. 'Ancient of days though he be,' Blunt speaks, 'with the rage of his soul untamed', 'all his wisdom of life', addressing himself

only to hearts that are strong,  
To him that hath courage to climb, who would gather time's  
samphire flowers, who would venture the crags among.  
To her who would lesson her soul to fear, with love for  
sermon and song.

Age has not made him prudent, for the philosophy of the young poet of the *Sonnets of Proteus* is repeated and re-enforced by the old poet who has found it good: 'Cast thy whole heart away'. Act! Give!

Where doubt is, do! Thou shalt stumble in thine  
endeavour,  
Ay, till thy knees be sore, thy back with the arrows of grief,  
and thou stand with an empty quiver.  
Yet shall thy heart prevail through its pain, for pain is a  
mastering lever.

In short:

Merlyn's message is this: he would bid thee have done  
with pride. . . .

Take thy joy with the rest . . .

And lay thee down when thy day is done content with the  
unrevealed.

As always it is the fulness of life that counts with Blunt:

Let us thank the dear gods for our madness, the rush of  
the blood in our veins, the exuberant pulsings of time.

Though he continued to write verse as long as he lived, in  
these volumes are to be found his best poems.

The latest of them is the elegy, 'The Happy Warrior',  
written soon after his death in 1913 in memory of George  
Wyndham, whose zest for life had all but equalled Blunt's own:

Here lay his victory. Not flowers alone  
Nor fruits were his,  
But the world's sadnesses  
He gathered also, its loves lost and gone,  
The tragic things.

The occasional poems written after this merited only the  
private printing which they received at Newbuildings on the  
Jubilee Press. Blunt himself explained: 'I am still able to  
write prose . . . But I shall write no more verse. That needs  
an overflow of vital force which cannot be renewed.'

## THE WAR AND SQUIREDOM

## I

'HISTORY is a jolly thing and English history perhaps the jolliest of all', observed Blunt on Waterloo Day, 1916, when the legend was rife that the English and French had always been friends and always hated the Germans. The ironies of the war years disgusted as well as amused him, from the petty foolishness of war-time hysteria—on the same day he received a message from his cousin Gerald Blunt advising him to breed wild rabbits in his garden as provision against possible famine and another from a neighbour requesting him to kill off his rabbits as they injured the tenants' crops and would bring on famine—to the serious inconsistencies of Governmental propaganda. The use of England's treaty with Belgium as a reason for entering the war seemed to him nonsense. England's real responsibility arose from having encouraged Belgium to fight when England could not give her adequate help. Belgium had long since broken her guarantee of neutrality; she had fortified her cities, kept a large army, and for some years before the war had sided obviously with the Triple Entente against Germany. When invited by the editor of the *Nation* to sign a manifesto headed 'Britain's Destiny and Duty' he replied by asking: 'Where was Grey's respect for treaty guarantees when he acquiesced in Austria's annexation of Bosnia, in Italy's raid on Tripoli and the dismemberment of Turkey after the Balkan War? Where especially has been his respect for his own written guarantee of Persia signed by himself?'

Blunt had longed for England to remain neutral. Not only

was Belgium unworthy of support—her worst offence in his eyes being, of course, her commercial exploitation of the Congo region—but so was France, once

the most serious, and perhaps the best  
Of all the nations which have power with men.

She too had ceased now to scorn hypocrisy. As for Germany: on August 3rd he wrote, 'for forty-five years I have loathed the Germans as few Frenchmen have had the constancy to loath them, but to-day I find my sympathies almost with them for at least they are acting like men who know their minds and pay not a jot of respect to the conventions of diplomacy. To-morrow, the fourth of August, is the anniversary of the Battle of Worth. I expect the first battle in the present campaign will be fought on the same day and by design'. Five days later he was outraged by the appointment of Kitchener, the hero of the Mahdi's head and concentration camps in South Africa, as virtual dictator in England.

The Allies' reply to President Wilson in January, 1917, seemed to him hypocritical to the last degree, especially because they declared that they had done nothing to provoke the war, had no selfish interest at stake, and were working only for the independence of peoples and the good of humanity. 'These principles,' declared Blunt, 'are to be exemplified everywhere apparently except just in the British Empire as to which not a word is said of a willingness to forgo their annexations of Egypt and Cyprus, or to restore the German colonies in Africa. There is no word of the Italians relinquishing their conquest of Tripoli, the French their conquest of Morocco, while Constantinople is to be taken from the Turks, including Gallipoli which England failed so egregiously to capture by force of arms.' Blunt despaired: 'Where is the use of talk? The object of the letter is clear, to raise a new war loan which was opened yesterday.'

The political game seemed to him to be played with less sincerity than ever.<sup>1</sup> When the Sultan Abdul Hamid died in

1918 Blunt observed dryly, 'I had almost added "good old man!" So wicked has the world grown since his comparatively innocuous day'. The loyalty to the Empire of the Nationalist leaders of Ireland and India was a further disillusionment: 'it knocks the bottom out of the whole Nationalist position'. Almost alone of Irish leaders Sir Roger Casement remained faithful to the Irish cause, the cause of his own country, as opposed to that of the British Empire, and for this Blunt honoured him. Casement had visited him early in 1914 and inspired him with confidence: if any man could effectively lead the Irish Volunteer Movement, with which Blunt was in sympathy, Casement appeared to be that man. When he was imprisoned for treason in 1916 Blunt held him to be no more guilty than any captured enemy. He had been fighting for his country's honour not for that of the British Empire. And his speech on June 29th seemed to Blunt 'the noblest apologia ever made by a political prisoner before his judges in the whole history of Irish or any other national war for freedom'.

In accordance with Casement's views he refused to help in obtaining a commutation of Casement's sentence based on the plea of insanity, since that would cheat him of his enviable martyrdom. But he upheld a plea based on the grounds of the grave national danger his execution would present in Ireland and of Casement's good work in Putumayo. He was touched to hear that Casement's chief reading after the trial was his 'Secret History Series' and to find at the end of a pencilled letter smuggled out of prison the message, 'give my love to Wilfrid Blunt'. After Casement's execution he wrote a long 'Ballad of Sir Roger Casement' never published and interesting only as a *credo* showing the complete consistency of Blunt's own attitude.

Blunt himself took no public action against the war or war measures. He realized now as he had realized in the Egyptian War of 1882 that England would tolerate a dissentient minority only if it did not interfere with the majority. To undertake any public crusade for peace was useless. He tried

to discourage a young soldier whom Lady Margaret Sackville brought to see him from preaching pacifism, although he sympathized deeply with his feeling. 'A pacifist position at the present moment,' he remarked, 'is that of a sane man shut up in a railway-carriage full of lunatics. It is wisest to sit still till the train stops, pretending to be asleep.'

But privately he did all that he could to mitigate the inhumanity of the war, subscribing to the work of groups such as the Society of Friends and professing himself willing to join in any plan to help against the 'repulsive treatment' accorded conscientious objectors. To stem the undisciplined rush of so-called patriotism he could only urge those with whom he came in contact at least to wage their war with a sense of reality and intelligence. When, late in August, 1914, he learned that his stableman Ike had been sneaking off at intervals to the nearby village of Coolham to drill, Blunt pointed out to him sharply that there could be no objection to his enlisting if he thought it right, but that such amateur drillings as those at Coolham were childish and quite useless. Nor did he oppose anyone who felt it necessary to go to the front though he made clear his own scorn of the attitude of most of his friends who regarded war as a high form of sport not to be missed. 'I believe,' he wrote wearily, 'I am the only person left in England without this feeling, I mean among people of my own class, or who has the sanity to thank Heaven I am too old to take part in the adventure.'

He refused to sign warlike manifestoes; and he refused to contribute war poems to the many anthologies that were being compiled. In answer to a proposed scheme for turning Woodgaters—a farm on the Newbuildings estate—into a kind of agricultural school for soldiers, he replied that he was not interested in soldiers being brought to settle on the land in Sussex unless they had been farm labourers there before the war. He did not want, he said, a lot of foreigners from the North of England upsetting native Sussex ways and introducing intensive cultivation.



When, however, Lord Goschen and the War Agricultural Committee decided that he must cultivate forty acres of the Newbuildings land, he made no objection. He preferred the weald in its native state, and knew that it was too poor and water-logged to bear crops except after several years' treatment at great expense. But the project, he remarked with sweet reasonableness, 'must be regarded as one of the follies of War which we have to submit to'.

During the last months of 1914 and the early part of 1915 when the English Government was in doubt about the way in which the great Mohammedan populations of the Empire would receive certain of their proposed actions, Blunt was urged to republish *The Future of Islam*. But during the War he republished no political writings and wrote only a few new political statements. Privately he worked often on his theories of the proper settlement of the world at the end of the War.

Over two decades earlier he had written:

I too have dreamed a dream which I would fain essay to  
interpret

A dream of infinite love, which, if my hour of wit  
were proved,

Should stand my message to the world, a voice of power  
for ever,

Binding the generations new to the past ages dumb.

This dream of peace was at the root of his nationalism—only in a world of nations, amicable because not rapacious, could peace be hoped for—and by the end of 1915 all hope had vanished. 'The only possible permanent peace,' he wrote then, 'is when one Power has made itself master of the rest, nor yet even then to anybody's advantage.' There could be no justice within an Empire, for, as Jemal-ed-Din had said long ago, 'justice is found where equal forces meet'. The possibility of even temporary peace lay in the Allies obtaining enough victory over Germany to satisfy 'our military vanity, but not enough to leave Germany at our mercy'. And when formal peace was

declared the situation was equally desperate because, said Blunt, nobody would admit that the war had its origin in the Anglo-French Entente of 1904 and the Foreign Office still made the alliance with France the pivot of its policy.

## 2

From the moment that hostilities were openly declared Blunt had seen in the war a triumph of all that he most detested and had felt that whichever way things went disaster would result for those regions of the world which interested him most. He feared particularly the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the fate of Islam, should Constantinople fall into the hands of Russia. As for Egypt, while the war was on there was nothing to do about it. It was still caught in the net in which it had been enmeshed for the past thirty-two years. He considerably surprised his friends by prophesying that in the end it would be taken over from the English by Italy.

As the peace negotiations progressed they struck him as a desperate game of double or quits. 'Indeed the nations of Europe remind me of nothing so much as of the gamblers I used to watch in the old days at Homburg sitting at the *Trente et quarante* tables, winning here and losing there, but all of them threatened with bankruptcy and increasing their stakes the more money they lost.' It seemed to him imperative, especially as Lloyd George's cry of 'hang the Kaiser' was heard on all sides, that the public should be shown the events leading to the war in a truer light than any official history was likely to cast upon them.

To this end he published *My Diaries*, the final two volumes of the 'Secret History Series', and appended to the second book a table of the 'chronology of events leading to the Great War of 1914 and especially to England's quarrel and war with Turkey'. The table made clear, he thought, that the war had

its origin in the East and particularly in British imperial action in the East. It began in 1875 with the Khedive Ismail's sale of the Suez Canal shares to the British Government, but showed that the first important step taken by England towards the future war was the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882. To keep Egypt England began her ententes with France and Russia and later Italy.

When the first volume, 'The Scramble for Africa' covering the years 1888-1900, appeared early in May, 1919, it justified Lady Gregory's opinion that it would have a greater success than any previous volume of the 'Secret History Series'. The Press was on the whole commendatory and it sold well. For the second volume, 'The Coalition Against Germany' covering the years from 1900-14, that appeared a year later, Lady Gregory was a less sure prophet. To lighten the book which was overweighted with politics and shadowed by the war, Blunt, she argued, had put in some personal sketches and scandals which it would be as well without. In the event, it was as great a success as the first, going beyond all expectations. One letter about it, Blunt remarked gleefully, could hardly have been exceeded in praise had it been addressed to Boswell on his life of Johnson. Far from resenting their inclusion in the book as Lady Gregory had feared they would, many of the persons in question seemed definitely pleased, the digs administered to their friends more than atoning for those given themselves.

As in the other volumes of the 'Secret History Series' people and events, comments and gossip are mingled in reminiscences of singular pungency. No English memoirs make better reading. Blunt's sense of character brings alive the world of the day as it passes through his pages—the poet laureate, Alfred Austin, caricatured as 'a little cock-sparrow of a man'; King Edward VII symbolized by the great beech-tree at Newbuildings Place which was uprooted by the storms following his death, 'quite rotten at the root, but one half of it clothed in its spring green'. The social scene is filled in

regardless of discretion and with amused understanding of the views of the *dramatis personæ*, Oriental and Western, high and low alike. Sheykh Mohammed Abdu's brother described to Blunt the Khedive's ball where for the first time he beheld women in European evening dress, 'naked nearly to the waist': "Who are they?" he inquired, outraged and confused. They told me "These are the wives of some of our English officials". "And their husbands," I asked, "do they permit them to go out at night like this?" "Their husbands," they answered, "are here", and they pointed out to me Mr. Royle, the Judge of Appeal, before whom I had often pleaded, a serious man and very stern . . . dancing with one of these naked ladies, gay and smiling and shameless, like a young man. "And he is here," I said, "to see his wife thus unclothed? And he dances with her publicly?" "That," they answered, "is not his wife, it is the wife of another." He saw Lord Cromer participating in the orgy, and the Khedive. He himself was 'jammed close to two of the naked ones'. 'Terribly ashamed,' he fled, taking his friends with him. This anecdote, like many others, cunningly reveals the racial and personal idiosyncrasies underlying public policy and its failures. Blunt was right in thinking his memoirs necessary, however 'queer', reading for both the social and political historian. And he felt his opinion justified when the Bibliothèque Nationale requested *My Diaries* as 'an historic monument connected with the war'.

Little attention, however, was paid to the serious purport of *My Diaries* even by those who read them with keenest enjoyment. Blunt's view of historical causes and effects carried no warning for his readers, though while the war was still on people began to address him as a sage and to regard Newbuildings, he said in 1916, 'as a kind of Noah's Ark riding calmly on the waters of the flood. This is amusing. Certainly everybody else has made a fool of himself while I have held my tongue'—a complacent statement to which truth bound him to add later, 'in so far as I have thought wise'.

When he did permit himself to speak during the war he had a way of striking down to bedrock that, surprising and often distressing as it might be, made those who listened feel that he had achieved, in Merlyn's words, 'the fruit of wisdom'.

His friends escaped the quandary created by this general air of wisdom combined with opinions which they did not trust by saying, as one of them put it, 'you are so differently built in your frame of mind, a mixture of philosophy and indifference'. Reading between the lines Blunt realized that, had he been twenty-five instead of seventy-six, they would have dubbed him slacker. 'There is an advantage in being old.'

By casual acquaintances and those who knew him only through hearsay he was pictured as an old man, arrogant and aloof, watching the world go round, and like a spider gloating over the flies caught in the web of disasters he had foretold. And by many he is still regarded as unpatriotic and unfeeling. No doubt he enjoyed a certain vindictive satisfaction when his prophecies fell true, but he was not unsympathetic. The deaths of his friends' sons were recorded by him starkly, too evidently grievous to need elaboration. They left him 'with the same angry feeling against the war and the waste of enthusiasm entailed by it on young men of this generation, choosing the best and most lovable for its victims'. Only a few months after the outbreak of war he had realized with lonely perspicacity that even those who survived were doomed: 'I don't know what will become of all these young men when the war is over. It will have spoilt them for other occupations, those that come out of it alive.'

The sacrifices of war were not to him as to most of his friends made to a glorious end but, doubly bitter, made to no purpose or worse than no purpose. The consciousness of holding views unlike those of his friends increased his sense of isolation. Age, which had taught him calmness in face of particular disasters, in some ways deepened his distress: 'I am

too old to adapt myself to new conditions. I can only sit helplessly on the floor and stare in front of me, staggered and indignant, knowing whatever further happens I can have no place in the world which will arise out of the ruins of this.'

The destruction of the old world was hateful to him—the loss of all individual freedom and all possibility of that quiet life which seemed to him the only thing in the world really worth having and which England had possessed beyond any other European nation. And the springing up of a new world in which people would have different brains from ours with different ideals of beauty and romance and morality offended his aesthetic sense. The American world of O. Henry's stories, he feared, would engulf England, a world whose virtues were as ugly as its vices and where there would be no upper class but one of wealth and everyone would be equal in a common drinking-bar vulgarity. 'People of the usual Yankee type, well meaning but altogether wearisome', such as some of the visitors to Newbuildings, would bring their manners into Europe with their money, calling it Democracy. 'I am not sure', he concluded, 'whether it would not be a lesser evil to pass under the aristocratic harrow of the Hun.'

## 3

Small vanities and larger faults Blunt may have had, a fire of impatient egotism that burst out frequently even in his seasoned old age, but the pattern of his life conforms with the design of the perfect life which he had outlined long ago in the preface to the fourth edition of *The Sonnets of Proteus*: 'Youth in feeling—manhood in battle—old age in meditation.' To him, naturally, meditation did not mean dreaming in idleness—after a lifetime of activity that would have been impossible,

And what were life unlabouring, life even here in this dear  
Eden,  
Were there no toil? Eternal perfectness in idle round  
Is God's sole lot to taste, not ours whom rage of hope  
possesses  
And Time disturbs with tales of change, and dark  
oblivion goads.

Meditation meant a quiet drawing together of earlier interests mellowed by the light of experience and reflection. He turned back with increased understanding to the history of his life in the diaries which he was putting into shape for publication. He laboured again on the history of the Crabbet Arabian stud, only the first chapter of which was privately printed, and on a history of the Blunt estates, particularly the Crabbet and Newbuildings lands, the first volume of which was also privately printed.

The outbreak of war and probably his still poignant sense of the loss of George Wyndham had sent him back to writing with renewed interest the prose counterpart to 'the Wisdom of Merlyn', his *Religion of Happiness*, begun in 1904. He wished to leave a true record of his position towards religion and especially a future life, the dream of which, he said, has misled all thought for thousands of years. The title is explained in 'the Quatrains of Life'—

Know then, all wisdom is but happiness.  
So thou art happy, there is none more sage  
Than thou of the wise seven famed of Greece.

Long ago in *Griselda* he had recognized the elusive quality of happiness:

Happiness is not  
A merchandise men buy or leave unbought  
And find again. It is a wild bird winging  
Its way through heaven, in joyous circles ringing,  
Aloft at its own will. Then, ere we wist,

It stooped and sat a moment on our wrist,  
And fondled with our fingers, and made play  
With jess and hood as if it meant to stay.  
And we, if we were wise and fortunate,  
And if the hour had been decreed of fate,  
Seized the glad bird and held it in our hand,  
And forced it to obey our least command,  
Knowing that never more, if not made sure,  
It would come again to voice, or sign, or lure.

Now he came to the conclusion that 'happiness depended on two things with me, being out of pain and being with those I loved, but as it is not given to everybody to enjoy these things it is no good trying to make general rules. All we can really affirm is that the natural world is on the whole a happy world and that man is a disturber in it with his tiresome intelligence and that death is the best ending for it after all.'

There his conclusions would have rested had he not begun to read the writings of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. They stirred him to further effort. Though Schopenhauer's philosophy was too pessimistic for him wholly to accept, he found it always logical with cold convincing logic, and all that was valuable in Nietzsche's philosophy he ascribed to Schopenhauer. Nietzsche's own theory of the superman who shall find happiness in a Will to Power he thought absurd. 'There is nothing in nature to show that violence, however successful, adds to happiness.' The lion is no happier than the lamb, he argued. The real reason of man's unhappiness is his forethought which forces him to work instead of play, to raid upon his fellow beasts instead of taking the kindly fruits of the earth as they come his way. The more he schemes for his comfort the more uncomfortable he becomes. He is the only one who grieves without physical pain. Were he ten times superman he would be only ten times the more unhappy.

In his early illnesses Blunt had entertained himself, to the



wonder of his friends, by reading the *Book of Job* which, with the *Song of Solomon*, he thought worth all the rest of human literature. He returned to it now in connection with his *Religion of Happiness* as the point of departure for a study of the Bible and the Church Fathers, a last attempt to persuade himself of the truth of Christianity, above all of Roman Catholicism—or, perhaps, a last test of his unbelief. But it led him to the conclusion that ‘all this about the “Aspects” of God is the veriest nonsense, so too is the whole scheme of Christianity’—a view from which he probably never again departed. It may well have been responsible for his failure to finish the *Religion of Happiness*, though increasing physical disability undoubtedly played a part. After his long illness in 1917 most of his literary work had to be done by dictation, to which philosophic reflection lends itself less easily than do records of fact and opinion.

After 1917 too, he was obliged to curtail many of his active pursuits and even on the few occasions when he hired a motor-car or journeyed in a railway carriage he seldom went beyond the Sussex borders. Fortunately he could say with truth that ‘a love of English country things and more especially of the actual clay soil of Sussex, with its deep hedgerows and its deeper oak woods, is still with me the most permanent instinct of my heart. I can hardly imagine happiness now in my old age without some such local anchorage, and I find it difficult to recognize as beautiful any scenery not that of our weald. So far indeed do I carry the feeling that I resent the intrusion of outside praisers of its loveliness, men who have come to it as strangers and have dared to sing of it as though it were their own.’

Naturally, then, he resented *The Petworth Posy*, a small volume in which, with Kipling, Belloc and Francis Thompson, he figured among the poets of Sussex. ‘As a fact,’ he remarked with some acerbity, ‘I am the only one of them born in the county or with any family connection in it.’ And after a drive to Bignor and the Roman Villa he grumbled absurdly, ‘I resent

these Roman remains in Sussex, they have no business to be here, outlandish, imperialistic'.

Blunt had become, as he had always wished to be, 'the Squire'. Nothing that took place on his lands escaped his paternal vigilance. In 1915 on the anniversary of his mother's death he had been able to declare with pride that, though there had been little in his life of which she would approve, in the management of the estate, at least, he had succeeded as well as his father had and was, he thought, 'as well beloved, no small thing after all'. But his position entailed many obligations:

Life's law is this:  
Pleasure is duty; duty pleasure  
In equal measure.

An estate in England inherited from ancestors, he explained to his grandson Anthony, was a little kingdom where the owner was in some sort responsible for the happiness of all its inhabitants and had a duty of preserving it, no less than a king had, and of transmitting it to his descendants.

It was the squire's business to see to the shooting. Blunt shot Worth Forest, went partridge shooting at Newbuildings, and rabbiting with his grandchildren—often trundled in his 'perambulator', a bath chair drawn by a scrubby little pony with broken knees named Job, from which, to his unconcealed delight, his guests testify, he shot astonishingly straight and quickly. On summer evenings he drove about the countryside behind his Arabs not only 'genealogically bent' on gathering materials for his histories, but seeing to it that his estates were in order. Interested as he was in bettering the living conditions of his tenants, reform to him was not improvement if it did not leave the tenants happier as well as healthier.<sup>2</sup> However heartily he agreed with his agent that the cottages at Dragon's Corner were poor and old-fashioned he refused to condemn them since they were loved by their inhabitants whom 'it would be cruel to evict'. His kindness, like that of

most really kind people not worn on his sleeve, sprang from a sensitive imagination as much as from intention. He understood the traditions and individual foibles of both tenants and servants, respected their special knowledge, found interest and amusement in their shrewd talk.

Though Pompey—a little black boy bought in the Cape Verde Islands in 1867—was the only one of his servants acquired as a slave, they all accorded him the unquestioning obedience that he expected. At eleventh hour notice they would provide, in some lovely place in the woods or fields, meals whose excellence was long remembered by visitors, straw-coloured wine and delicious simple food set out on the coarse clean cloth; or, when it became impossible for Blunt to go far from the house, in the paddock among the daffodils when the almond-trees were in bloom or under the trees in the Jubilee Garden, ‘a peacock coming to be fed, and a black spotted lamb to look on, and Dot the favourite spaniel setting up a loud cry for food’. The ordering of daily life simply and naturally was with Blunt a fine art. He knew how to extract the last drop of individuality from his surroundings.

George Wyndham once said to him that ‘to be happy is to be able to say I want and I won’t’. By that criterion so far as his tenants and household were concerned, Blunt was happy, for his rule was that of the feudal lord of ancient times, he had only to speak and his wishes were carried out.

In his family relationships Blunt’s imperious character was less fortunate. This is not the place to examine the estrangement from his wife and daughter which had begun so far back as 1896, or his complete break with Lady Anne in 1906, or his frequent serious differences with his daughter from 1908 onwards. The conflict of temperaments, all three so little simple and pliable, was perhaps inevitable. ‘Some of these days’, Blunt once said, ‘the whole story of my domestic life will be published, if there is any demand on the public’s part to know about it, and meanwhile it must rest where it is—*qui s’excuse s’accuse*.’ But family dissensions so distinctly

coloured his life in its later years that his reconciliation with Lady Anne in 1915 and his final rupture with his daughter should be recorded.

A first meeting for over eight years took place between Blunt and Lady Anne in Worth Forest early in 1915. Blunt was deeply impressed by her then as 'a noble and pathetic figure' and he was glad to feel that he might again be able 'to protect and help her'. Other meetings followed, a joint inspection of Lady Anne's part of the Arabian stud at Crabbet and even of the stud at Newbuildings. Her Ladyship, said Blunt, 'is far more active than I am and with a better use of all her faculties, her head clearer than I ever remember it. There is every prospect of her living for another ten years and it will be for everyone's good that she should do so.' To Blunt it soon seemed that all things between them had been settled amicably, in especial the fate of the Arabian stud which they owned jointly. Lady Anne established herself on the Crabbet estate near her daughter, going out as usual in the autumn of 1915 to Egypt for the winter. There she lived in her own quarters, 'the pink house', in the garden of Sheykh Obeyd, engrossed in the management of the part of the stud which had been left in Egypt, a time-consuming business after the death of her factotum Mutlak in 1916. At the big house in the garden, Philip Napier, son of Blunt's old friend Mark Napier, and his wife were living, and upon them she depended for affectionate society. Though she went seldom to Cairo, visitors were constantly coming from there to her. It was no uncommon sight to see Lady Anne in the paddock showing her horses to a group of young officers eager to pay her their respects.

Repeatedly Blunt besought Lady Anne to return to England, but always there was some reason why she could not. 'If I have one wish now to ask of fate,' he wrote, 'it would be to see her here again and it is precisely the one wish I shall not see granted, for she, it is clear, has made up her mind to stay on through the summer in Egypt and it is hardly likely that both

of us will last another winter.'

She was then seventy-eight and he, seventy-five. The reason she gave for not returning was the difficulty of getting from Egypt to England during the War.\*

Blunt was more than ever 'disposed to look gloomily on the future'. A sale had been announced of a portion of the Crabbet estate. He was anxious to avert this, or, failing that, to buy back, as he succeeded in doing, Frogshole Farm and Little Blackwater. These were dear to him because they were the fields that his brother Francis had kept with Worth Forest for his own shooting and where Blunt had spent so many happy days with his sister Alice angling the stream.

This at least is true,  
That in the Mole are trout, and many too,  
As I have often proved with rod and line  
From boyhood up, blest days of pins and twine!  
How many an afternoon have our hushed feet  
Crept through the alders where the waters meet,  
Mary's and mine, and our eyes viewed the pools  
Where the trout lay, poor unsuspecting fools,  
And our hands framed their doom—while overhead  
Its orchestra of birds the blackbird led.

Though he was a little consoled by holding the two farms safely again in his own hands a breach had been created that was never healed.<sup>3</sup> Indeed when Lady Anne died it was

\* It having been represented to the Publishers that passages on this page and elsewhere suggest that the estrangement between Blunt and his daughter Lady Wentworth and her mother was due to quarrels about the stud and to unreasonable conduct on her part, and that the necessity for the sale of the Crabbet Estate was caused by her mismanagement, and that she treated Blunt unfairly, these passages have now been withdrawn, and the Publishers acknowledge that any suggestions to the effect stated are without foundation.

widened by a new and even more violent quarrel concerning the Arab stud.

After Lady Anne's departure for Egypt she and Blunt exchanged many long and friendly letters, often concerned with the future disposal of the stud. In mid-June 1917, on the death of her niece, Mary Wentworth, Lady Anne came into the title of Baroness Wentworth.<sup>4</sup> Twenty years ago, Blunt confessed, the succession would have been a matter of vain-glory to him, and as it was he felt a certain satisfaction in it, if only as an ornament on the family tree and giving him the right to place her arms as a scutcheon of pretence upon his Blunt and Scawen shield.<sup>5</sup> He was interested chiefly, however, in the fact that the necessity of making her legal claim to the peerage might be a means of bringing Lady Anne home from Egypt.

But on December 6th, a wire from the Napiers told him that Her Ladyship was alarmingly ill. 'I had been envying her the delight of being (at Sheykh Obeyd) in December,' said Blunt, 'the most perfect month and wishing I was with her, but this at her age looks very like the end. *Ai de mi!*' Ten days later came the news of Lady Anne's death on December 15th. Only then did he learn that she had been ill for a good many weeks, cared for devotedly by the Napiers, her courage so indomitable that she had acknowledged no suffering nor loneliness nor allowed anyone in England to be told of her danger until almost the end. She was buried in the Nuns' burial ground at the Jebel Ahmar, as she would have liked, on the edge of the Eastern desert, and a tombstone designed by Blunt erected there.<sup>6</sup>

Her death, though not wholly unexpected, was a heavy blow to him. 'Your letter,' he wrote to his sister-in-law soon after the news came, 'consoles me, as far as it is possible I should be consoled, for what is an immense loss to me, far more than it would have been five or ten years ago, for I had latterly been counting on spending the evening of our days together and making up for much lost time of affection and

completing arrangements we both had at heart.' He was so certain of their agreement that Lady Anne's will, written six months before her death, astonished him. It contained only one mention of him—a bequest of the stud books—written in 'harsh and mechanical language' with no suggestion that the estrangement from him had given place to the old affection, and it disposed of her property, particularly the stud, in a way not at all in accord with what he had understood to be her plan.

Her part of the stud was left to her two granddaughters in trust; two important bequests that she had promised to persons outside the immediate family were omitted; and she had not left to Blunt the manuscript books about the Arab horse and certain other papers as she had agreed. The will was quite out of harmony both with her own recent letters to him and with what he had understood to be her intentions when she left England. It seemed to him to show that even in the best of women the sense of justice cannot be relied on. Some comfort he drew from the fact that she had written to his cousin not long before her death saying 'the blessing I earnestly desire for myself, apart from the successful ending of the war, is that I may live to find Wilfrid and Judith and the children and myself all united'. And a message sent through Napier as she was dying, although it altered nothing, made him happier, for it said that Lady Anne's wish had been to make arrangements for the stud to fit in with his last proposals concerning it.

Yet not many weeks later Blunt was given a list of mares that her Ladyship had offered for sale to an American shortly before her death comprising practically the whole breeding stud. The illogicality of her conduct was bewildering: 'Here was Anne, the noblest of beings and with all excellencies of mind, who had two strong objects in view, the one to perpetuate and provide for the Arab stud as an institution of great public importance, the other to restore family unity between me and Judith and the children, and who wearied Heaven

with her prayers for this last object during the last year especially of her life, and yet who in the midst of it puts her hand to a will which could not but accentuate all the causes of family quarrel and go near to wrecking the stud. Truly one needs to be a cynic about human wisdom whether male or female.'

Although he had observed just before their reconciliation that Lady Anne was 'very like her grandmother Lady Byron, forgetting nothing and forgiving nothing', not until her diaries, extending from 1913 to the time of her reconciliation with him, were put into his hands did he suspect that her actions in regard to the stud sprang from more than a misunderstanding. The diaries were written with a bitterness against him of which he had had no suspicion and made very painful reading for him. They destroyed for him the ideal picture he had made of Lady Anne's character. Why, he asked, did she give them to me?

After Lady Anne's death the part of the stud which had been at Sheykh Obeyd was sold on Blunt's advice by the trustees to an American; and the sale of the old Sheykh Obeyd garden at the end of January not only enabled him to pay the two bequests promised by Lady Anne though omitted from her will, but brightened the prospects of keeping the New-buildings stud going for a year longer.

Although there had been no demand for Arabian horses in England during the War, many visitors had come to see the stud and purchases had occasionally been made by visitors from other countries—a young Boer; the military attaché for the Spanish Government; a South American horse dealer who brought his whole family of thirteen to see the stud. Buyers from the United States of America had been the most numerous though even they were few. But the stud had prospered. At the time of Lady Anne's death every doubtful horse and mare had been weeded out, it had never been so 'splendidly perfect'. 'I keep repeating to myself,' said Blunt, 'as the mares gallop and wheel in the meadows,



'Whence are ye noble Ladies, whence are ye?  
So many and so many and such glee.'

Such enjoyment was short lived. A claim was made almost immediately to part of the Newbuildings' stud by the grandchildren's trustees and a long struggle, fraught with anxiety and bitterness ensued—during which, ironically enough, he was named President of the Arab Horse Society. The trustees' claim was taken to court and the lawsuit became Blunt's chief business in life, filling his nights and days with worry. The strain became so great that when the decision eventually went against him he maintained in his relief that it was all for the best. The stud had cost £3,000 a year, he said—of which Lady Anne doubtless had paid some part—and he felt unable to look after it as he used. Except for the six mares which Blunt was permitted to keep, it went at last to Crabbet where it is still carried on.\*

In general Blunt's feeling towards children was that 'they spoil conversation not only narrowing the subject, but still more by the attention they require of their parents who have an eye always watching them instead of thinking what they are saying'. Of his three grandchildren, however, he was extremely fond and had much enjoyed their frequent visits to Newbuildings for the holidays, or the shorter visits when 'the

\* See footnote to p. 358.

children came to lunch in the cherry orchard and sang their country songs'.

Charming as Blunt was, he could be very cold and indifferent to anyone who seemed to him shallow or pretentious, and he chilled many a grown person by his obvious boredom. To the grandchildren, though not a familiar or easy companion, he was not terrifying but delightful. When one of their three white rabbits died he understood their grief. It reminded him of his own youthful sorrows: 'I never wept such floods of tears in my life as when a mouse I had tamed died suddenly some sixty-five years ago at Littlehampton'. He liked to take them rabbiting or shooting or for longer jaunts to Fernycroft, or to Worth Forest where he walked with Anne and Winnie in the evening by the river through a glorious mass of bluebells and sprang a woodcock. He gave them pet animals and birds.

For Anthony he had a special affection as his grandson would have been, in the normal course of events, his heir. He treated Anthony's education more seriously than that of the two little girls, trying to inculcate in him the sense of responsibility proper to a landowner, and the precepts of an Englishman not an Imperialist. He liked Anthony to accompany him on visits to neighbours. There is an amusing anecdote of a call which they made together on a neighbouring lady who, as her custom was, slapped the boy on the back and called him 'old chap': 'it will be good for him as a first lesson in the ways of women', remarked Blunt, 'me it makes shy'. On the whole, he thought the relationship with grandchildren a better one than with one's own children. 'The pleasure of life', he was in the habit of saying, 'is to live with the old when you are young and with the young when you are old'.

The separation from his grandchildren was a real deprivation to him: 'My birthday of seventy-six,' he noted on August 17th, 1917, 'which was rather sad without any of the children.' The deaths of old friends touched him keenly, less, perhaps, by the implied break—'after seventy', he said, 'one bears things

easily. I feel it myself. The dead are then, "not lost but gone before" —than by the sadness 'of lingering on behind the rest'. And of course the changes brought by the war fell darkly upon him. Worst of all he was ill and in almost constant pain. Kept awake by suffering and by the old habits of reading at night and waking at five in the morning, he would sometimes fall asleep, just before the dinner hour. No one wished to have him waked, knowing that the process of waking was most painful to him. Visitors would wait through the evening to be startled at nine-thirty or ten by groans that re-echoed through the house. Presently the fine figure, tall, lean, slightly bent, with long white beard and smouldering eyes, would enter in Bedouin robes and the belated dinner would begin.

Much of the winter time, from 1917 on, he lay upstairs in his oak-panelled room whose windows looked out across the weald to the Downs. Like the whole house, the room was filled with objects, many worthless in themselves, others of value: familiar, homely things and strange things from distant countries, brought together in the clutter of daily life and for their association with his past adventures. Around the fireplace and on shelves in the corner were ranged rows of photographs of his friends; and from the bed's canopy a huge ostrich egg hung above him in Mohammedan tradition to bring him good luck. A few months before his death other beds were set up in the living rooms of the house so that he might rest where and when he could. Sometimes he was too ill to talk much with his guests. 'It was a shock', one of them wrote in 1919, 'to see him in bed, breathing badly and apparently very weak, and complaining of pain and not being able to keep warm. . . . He says he wishes for death and though he has had such a good life, would not begin it again on any account'. The certainty of tone, complain though he might, shows his old spirit.

## 4

Blunt had been sheltered always by devotion, and in his old age was cared for tenderly by Miss Dorothy Carleton, a cousin of George Wyndham's, whom he had adopted as his niece in 1906. 'How came I,' he wrote towards the end of the 'Quatrains of Life',

How came I by this jewel, this sweet friend,  
This best companion of my lone life's end?  
So young she was, so fair, of soul so gay,  
And I with only wisdom to commend.

She and his faithful nurse, Miss Lawrence, indeed everyone connected with the place, did all they could to make life run in complete accord with the Squire's every wish. And so long as he lived his friends stood loyally by him, writing long letters and returning with pleasure to Newbuildings, for his vitality, though it might sap theirs, still stimulated them to fresh awareness of life.

Hilaire Belloc constantly dropped in full of news from London—literary, religious, political. 'I have lived this winter on Belloc,' wrote Blunt in 1914. He was particularly pleased by Belloc's praise of the effigy of his brother Francis, which he had carved for the tomb of his brother and sister in the church of the Crawley Fathers, for, though rarely spoken of, he himself thought it perhaps his finest work in any medium. Spurred on by Belloc's late recognition and that of a few others, he built a small chapel adjoining the church in order to protect the tomb from possible harm. Unfortunately he fell too ill after the building was begun to supervise it; the aspect of the chapel as seen through the barred window from the church is stark, and the light falls unsympathetically on the marble figure.

Belloc brought many visitors to Newbuildings, among them Basil Blackwood who had already announced his intention, to Blunt's pleasure, of becoming the older poet's disciple, and

Father Grogan, a Jesuit from Stonyhurst who afterwards sent Blunt photographs of the school. 'The remembrance of Stonyhurst', said Blunt, 'always fills me with a tender feeling, happy and good, two things which do not often go together in life, and a wish to believe the things I believed when I was there, and do the things I did as a boy of twelve. But my power of believing the unbelievable is absolutely gone, far more than that of any physical gymnastic I can imagine myself doing.'

Old friends came—Lady Helena Carnegie with her nephew, a young poet, to call on the old poet; Lady Blanche Hozier to stay the summer of 1916 at Carpenters, a house on the Newbuildings estate that Blunt often lent to friends; and Mrs. Asquith, later Lady Oxford and Asquith, at the height of her power as the Prime Minister's wife. It was all, he wrote after her second visit, 'rather like Offenbach *opéra bouffe*,' but, he added, 'it is something to have loved and been loved by Margot'. Desmond MacCarthy spent an occasional weekend with him and Shane Leslie, who when he came to Newbuildings first in 1910 with his cousin Winston Churchill had seemed to Blunt to be the young man he had always hoped for: an Irishman, a witty speaker, a member of the landlord class, and a convert to both Catholicism and Nationalism—one who could do much, he thought, for Nationalist Ireland. Wilfrid Meynell, Sydney Cockerell, Osborne Beauclerk were frequent visitors, the latter often bringing war news fresh from France. Letters and visits from Theodore Rothstein and John Dillon and especially from Winston Churchill and his wife kept his political wheels going. Robert Cunninghame Graham, with whom he had quarrelled about Casement, returned occasionally after the war was over to talk of their common friend, W. H. Hudson, and the Pampas and Morocco, and oftenest, of horses.

In a review of *My Diaries* in 1920 E. M. Forster, who knows both India and Egypt well, wrote that Blunt's 'power of alluring the East' can be tested by 'mentioning his name to any educated Indian or Egyptian. . . . In the most unexpected

places—perhaps on a roof-top among the Patna bazaars—one may suddenly awake a eulogy upon him'. The new generation of Indians and Egyptians no longer cared, however, when they came to England to seek advice at Newbuildings Place. Blunt's news of the East was brought to him by English travellers—by Terence Bourke with whom he had travelled in Tunis; by 'a very British consul' from Damascus who thought that Blunt's house there had probably been confiscated; by the Reuter's agent from Persia who reported frequent talks about Blunt with his old acquaintance Ali Koli Khan of the Bactiari. Professor E. G. Browne of Cambridge, who saw eye to eye with him on Eastern subjects, catalogued his Persian and Arabic manuscripts. A few months before Blunt's death, Colonel T. E. Lawrence, who had just returned from Arabia, gave him 'the full news of what was going on in Mesopotamia, Palestine and the rest of the Arabic-speaking provinces of Asia' then occupied by Great Britain. Upon each return from the East Lawrence repaired to his 'Master Arabians', Doughty and Blunt, finding the latter 'a fire yet flickering over the ashes of old fury'.

With Skittles Blunt had never lost touch, and now in these later years her long illegible racy letters afforded him much amusement. Part of a letter about the German Kaiser written by her on November 20th, 1914, suggests their general tone: 'I knew the present Emperor so well when he was Crown Prince and I have two letters he wrote me and he also gave me his photograph and a jewelled sunshade, the latter I have sold to get some money for the poor wounded troops. He was most charming to me, the Emperor, when I was a girl (N.B.' Blunt inserted here, 'she cannot have been less than forty) and he went cracked over my riding. He couldn't ride a little bit, but he looked well on horseback, and had a very handsome face for a German, it had not got hard at that time. He was a short man not so tall as myself, but most charming and nice and simple at that time.'

Occasionally Skittles paid a visit to Newbuildings. In

March, 1918, Blunt wrote, 'Thank God, here is spring at last, a roaring lion it has come and with it XX (Skittles) . . . to spend the day and see the horses. Though deaf and partly blind XX is unconquered in talk, and gave us all the gossip of the hour though it is too piecemeal for reproduction. . . . I sent her away happy with a basket of butter and eggs to eke out her London rations. Of the stallions she prefers Rasim.' Skittles consulted Blunt about her many difficulties during the war and, as she grew older, about her illnesses, and Blunt never failed in either sympathy or aid. When she died on August 4th, 1920, he arranged, in spite of many complications, for her burial in the churchyard of the Crawley Fathers where her sister is also buried.

Many old ties loosened in the years preceding the war, were renewed soon after its outbreak: letters came from Mrs. Pollen after close on ten years' silence; and from the Baroness Mary Von Hügel whom Blunt had known well in the days of his youth; from Mabel Batten, whom he had met at Simla in 1879 and to whom he had written a number of songs, notably one called 'Butterflies'; from Mrs. Stillman, whom he had seen first at Kelmscott and then at Rome, and with whom he had been 'terribly in love', he said, 'thirty years ago'.

In 1914, for the first time in nine years, Mrs. Percy Wyndham began again to visit Newbuildings—'a revival for me', wrote Blunt, 'of days between forty and fifty years ago when I spent so much of my youth with Madeline practising art and poetry'. They talked together of her son George Wyndham who was always very present to Blunt's thoughts and who was responsible, too, for a new friendship that Blunt made with Lord Ribblesdale, whose daughter had married George Wyndham's son. 'Talking with Ribblesdale', Blunt said, 'one strikes sparks at each word and without an effort and feels one's best so that it is a vivid pleasure. He has known nearly all the people I have known and has formed the same opinion of them that I have formed, and he is a man of the world to the exact extent that I am a man of the world, having got all the pleasure out of it and never having been its

slave, and he is a poet without having written poetry and has dabbled in politics without being a politician. Also he is essentially an aristocrat and as essentially a lover of his own people, the country people among whom he lives at home in Yorkshire as I live in Sussex.' When he and Mark Napier turned up at Newbuildings for shooting they had 'a merry dinner' with talk of political men they had known and later, in connection with the memoirs that Ribblesdale thought of publishing, a discussion of how much truth could be told. Blunt gave him copies of his own books as examples of his views of the limits to which one should go. In general the memoirs published during these years by Blunt's friends and acquaintances were too discreetly bowdlerized to meet with his favour.

Lady Margaret Sackville was among the most faithful visitors to Newbuildings. Blunt rightly took to himself some little glory for her success as a poet, just as he always felt that Lady Gregory owed much of her achievement to his influence—a proud claim, for in 1919 he remarked to her, 'I know and have often said that you have done more than any other individual for Ireland'. She had 'focussed', and so greatly increased, the value of Ireland to others, to Hyde and to Yeats, for instance. And he noted, 'I am more than ever struck with Lady Gregory's intellectual superiority to every other woman I have ever known. It is not a man's intellect, it is a woman's but she has the power of continuous original work—and dramatic construction': no slight praise, and its sincerity is borne out by the trust that he put in her judgment, especially on literary matters.

Lady Gregory was among the last visitors to Newbuildings Place during its Squire's lifetime. A month before his death she wrote, 'the house looks so fine, the old oak doors and woodwork, the blazing oak log fires, the bunches of everlasting, the (to-day) sun shining in. . . . He said good-bye to me, "we shall never meet again".'



## 5

Since his early terrified struggles in Frankfort over the prospect of future damnation, Blunt had never feared death,

that death, which seems  
So hard a master when he holds his prize,  
Whom no cajoleries, nor stratagems  
Of beauty's power, nor wisdom's sophistries,  
E'er turned aside from his appointed way,  
But falcon-like, who with relentless foot  
And pinions spread above his captured prey,  
Holds his high way in heaven absolute  
Nor heeds our questionings.

Rather for many years he had wished for it. More and more he felt, as he put it in 1919, that 'there is nothing so wearisome as what I have become, an ancient last year's fly which can only buzz as it lies on its back and refuses quite to die'. The disabilities of old age and illness irked him intolerably and suffering made him long for freedom from pain. Nor had he any greater wish to live his life over, than when, as a young man, he wrote, 'Love, life, vain strength—O who would live again'.

But if he desired death, it was not with any hope of a future life, nor indeed with any desire for one if his own written statements are to be believed. Many years before, it is true, on a visit to the poet laureate, Alfred Austin, as they sat with others on the lawn in the afternoon, it was suggested that each person should tell his idea of heaven: 'Austin's idea was to sit . . . in a garden, and while he sat to receive constant telegrams announcing alternately a British victory by sea and a British victory by land'; 'mine', said Blunt, 'was to be laid out to sleep in a garden, with running water near, and so to sleep for a hundred thousand years, then to be woke by a bird singing, and to call out to the person one loved best, "Are



WILFRID BLUNT'S GRAVE



you there?" and for her to answer, "Yes, are you?" and so turn round and go to sleep again for another hundred thousand years'. But at the last it was for deep and dreamless sleep with never any waking that he longed.

When the shadows come, when the crowd is leaving the  
mart,  
Then shalt thou learn that thou needest sleep, Death's  
kindly arms for thy heart.

In a letter to Lady Anne written in August, 1917, in answer to one from her explaining her long-ago conversion to Roman Catholicism, he told her of his re-examination during the previous year of the questions he had argued forty or more years ago with Dr. Meynell, 'especially', he wrote, 'as to the probability of a future life, my chief difficulty, and the grounds on which the church originally rested its beliefs in a resurrection'. He quoted from the *Book of Job*: *There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. . . . yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth and wasteth away: Yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.* 'This', he said, 'is exactly what I feel to be the only reality, as it was to Job.'

His lack of belief in a future life was common knowledge to his friends for he discussed the matter freely both with those who agreed with his views and those, like Lady Gregory, who did not. 'Well, I believe we shall meet again after death,' she once remarked, 'and I will say "I told you so"'; but if we don't you will have the worst of it, for you can't say anything to me.'

Yet certain of his friends hold that at the last moment he regained a faith he had never really lost, in the Roman Catholic Church and its doctrines.<sup>7</sup> It is a fact that Blunt received

extreme unction before his death on September 12th, 1922, though whether because of belief in its efficacy or owing to friendly pressure may be questioned. His will, whose last codicil is dated less than a month before his death, provided for his burial in unconsecrated ground without church rites. The directions are explicit and in character with his lifelong independence. He requested that he be laid in the ground in the simplest manner 'wrapped in my old Eastern travelling carpet and without coffin or casket of any kind in a spot in Newbuildings wood known to my executors without religious ceremony or the intervention of strangers but by men employed on my Newbuildings Estate'.

The spot chosen by him is in the tall grass of a long tree-lined ride a short distance from the Newbuildings garden. There, on September 15th, 1922, he was buried in the presence of a few intimate friends one of whom had wrapped him as he had wished in his travelling carpet. Over the grave later was placed a monument, similar to the one that he had designed for Lady Anne's grave, of grey Sussex stone, perfectly proportioned, and unadorned except for his armorial bearings, his name and dates, and a few lines of his own:

Dear checker-work of woods, the Sussex Weald!  
If a name thrills me yet of things of earth,  
That name is thine. How often I have fled  
To thy deep hedgerows and embraced each field,  
Each lag, each pasture,—fields which gave me birth  
And saw my youth, and which must hold me dead.

Lichens have overgrown the stone; rabbits dart and play about it; birds sing in the near-by trees; time has brought Blunt's grave into harmony with the Sussex Weald.

## NOTES

CITATIONS in the text of this book are made from Blunt's published writings, books by other authors marked by an asterisk in the bibliography, and unpublished private papers.

Blunt's spelling of transliterated Arabic words has been used throughout this book.

### CHAPTER I

1. Something of the pride and beauty of their descendant Wilfrid Scawen *page 15*

Blunt is to be seen in the portraits of Samuel Blunt of Horsham and Winifred, his wife, in a painting by John Zoffany, R.A., reproduced in colour in *English Conversation Pieces of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, by Dr. G. C. Williamson (Plate xxxvi).

2. Mary and George Wyndham left two surviving sons: Henry, who *page 18*

succeeded to the title in 1869; and Percy Scawen, who in 1860 married Madeline, daughter of Sir Guy and Lady Campbell. The Hon. Percy Wyndham and Madeline Wyndham had five children: Mary, married Lord Elcho, later Earl of Wemyss, 1883; George, 1863-1913; Guy, 1865- ; Madeline, married Charles Adeane, Esq., of Babraham, Cambridge; and Pamela, married first the Hon. Edward Tennant, later Lord Glenconner, and second Lord Grey of Fallodon.

It is to Percy Wyndham's wife, Madeline, and not to his daughter, to whom Blunt most often refers in his writings. She was the granddaughter of Lord Edward Fitzgerald and Pamela, the reputed daughter of Philippe d'Orléans and Madame de Genlis.

Percy Wyndham's son George was the great friend of Blunt's later years. In 1887 he married Lady Sibell Lumley, daughter of the ninth Earl of Scarborough, married first Earl Grosvenor by whom she had three children: Cuckoo, later Countess of Shaftesbury; Lettice, later Countess Beauchamp; and Bendor, Lord Belgrave, later Duke of Westminster. George Wyndham and Lady Grosvenor had one son, Percy, born in 1887, married Diana Lister, daughter of Lord Ribblesdale, killed in action in 1914.

- page 22 3. In later years Roman Catholic ritual did not appeal to Blunt. 'Little as I am a Protestant,' he wrote in 1914, 'I have a great aesthetic dislike for the Catholic ceremonial, the baptism, marriage and burial rites with the complexities of incense, holy water and the rest, while the Church of England ceremonial is really dignified in all three. The *Dies Irae* chant is fine and nothing else in the Catholic ritual.'
- page 23 4. Stonyhurst is known as Crowhurst in *Proteus and Amadeus*.
- page 25 5. Julia Margaret Cameron, daughter of Mr. Pattle of strange fame; friend of Tennyson and Watts; great-aunt of Mrs. Virginia Woolf; and one of the first and most unrelenting of photographers. Cf.—*Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women*, by Virginia Woolf, Hogarth Press, 1926.
- page 26 6. Henry Currie was the father of four sons who enter Blunt's history at various points: Bertram, banker and strong political supporter of Gladstone; Philip, later Lord Currie, Private Secretary to Lord Salisbury, Head of the Foreign Office, and Ambassador; Francis Gore, Blunt's especial friend among the Curries and known to him as 'Bitters'; and George. Sir Philip Currie married Blunt's friend, Mary Montgomery i.e., 'Violet Fane', first married to Henry Sydenham Singleton.
- page 27 7. Dr. Meynell's portrait by Moloney hangs now at Newbuildings Place.
- page 28 8. *Proteus and Amadeus* is the only published document that shows consecutively and directly Blunt's inner life. The letters convey something of the writers' charm, and their candour and spontaneity appeals to the reader's sympathy, however old-fashioned the point of view may now seem.

Neither correspondent wished to have his own letters published. Blunt felt that Dr. Meynell's letters, which had 'helped' him greatly, should be made available to the public. Dr. Meynell agreed to the publication of his letters only on condition that Blunt should at the same time publish his. They were published anonymously and fictitious names were adopted for real persons and places. Not till Blunt was an old man did he publicly acknowledge the authorship. Cardinal Newman, he wrote in *My Diaries*, 'had almost consented himself to do the editing, for Dr. Meynell, the Amadeus of the letters, was much at Edgbaston just then. But for one reason or another the old man changed his mind, and de Vere [Aubrey de Vere] undertook the thing for him and wrote the preface'.

In connection with *Proteus and Amadeus* Blunt stayed with Newman in 1876 or 1877 at Edgbaston on the way home from a visit to Ireland. He arrived at the Oratory with a raging toothache which disappeared at once when he touched Newman's hand. At the time Blunt was cautioned not to speak of this 'miracle' but he wrote of it years later in *My Diaries*.

## CHAPTER II

1. In *Proteus and Amadeus* Blunt says that his belief and practice of *page 32* religion underwent no particular change during the two years after he went into the world at the age of sixteen (i.e. 1856-8) and implies that his first diplomatic post was at Constantinople. Probably these and other inaccuracies, such as the length of his stay at two schools and the failure to mention a third, are intentional in order to mislead the reader as to the identity of the author.
2. Mother of Bertrand Russell, the mathematician, now Earl Russell. *page 36*
3. Before returning to Germany he paid a month's visit to cousins in *page 37* Ireland (1861-2).
4. In later life Skittles was known as Mrs. Bailey. Her gravestone in *page 42* the churchyard of the Franciscan monastery at Crawley is lettered C.W.B.
5. Ferdinand of Coburg-Kohary, King of Portugal, and his mistress, *page 47* Elise Hensler, daughter of a Boston tailor who captivated Ferdinand while singing in *Un Ballo Maschera*. He installed her in his palace at Cintra in 1855 and married her in 1869 when Duke Ernest II of Coburg made her Countess Edla in the peerage of Saxe-Coburg Gotha.
6. During his convalescence in the autumn of 1866 Blunt journeyed *page 48* through Switzerland to Florence and Rome.
7. Blunt, always interested in horses, had learned in Spain 'to appreciate *page 52* the desert type of horseflesh as it existed still pure in Andalusia'. During the months in South America he found that English thoroughbred sires had not yet been introduced into the River Plate district; the only breed on the Pampas when Blunt was there was the Andalusian breed brought by the early Spanish settlers. It was an excellent and hardy breed, Blunt found, with certain defects of shape attributable more to its Barb ancestry than to the true Arabian.



## CHAPTER III

- page 53 1. The marriage took place on June 8th, 1869. Eight days later Blunt's sister Alice married and shortly after came the first marriage of Lady Anne's brother.
- page 53 2. Lady Anne, born in 1837, was three years older than Blunt.
- page 53 3. Of her brother Blunt wrote at the time of his death in August 1906, that he was 'original almost to the point of genius, but without the smallest sense of proportion'. Lady Anne was devoted to him. Though Blunt saw little of him in later years when Lord Lovelace was 'too wrapped up in his family history to work seriously at anything else', Lovelace generally sided with him in politics.
- page 53 4. Cf. Sonnet VIII in *Love Sonnets of Proteus*. Many lines of Blunt's poetry might well be applied to her even if not written specifically to or for her—such as,
- the wild-birds' music of her voice which we shall hear in dreams  
till we too sleep,  
from *Sonnets and Songs by Proteus*.
- page 58 5. Alice Blunt died August 11th, 1872. Francis Blunt died April 21st, 1872.
- page 59 6. On the pedestal is a tablet commemorating his sister.
- page 60 7. Crabbet is referred to inaccurately in Augustus Hare's *Sussex* as 'a modern Georgian house, built from the admirable design of its mistress, Lady Anne Blunt, the African traveller and granddaughter of the poet Byron. The place has become celebrated,' Hare continues, 'for its breed of Arab horses and their sales. The owner of the house, Mr. Wilfrid Blunt, has insisted on a wild piece of land, covered with rubbish heaps and brushwood—"the African desert"—being left in front of the house door, in curious contrast to the well-kept lawns and pleached alleys a little farther off.'
- page 62 8. The Blunts had brought home from Asia Minor a little grey stallion of a superior type—doubtless an Arab—very pretty and of great courage and endurance. With him they made their first practical experiment in pony breeding at Crabbet. The stallion was mated with half-a-dozen pony mares bought the following summer at Barnet Fair. It was a haphazard experiment, leading to no result of any importance but suggesting to them the idea of a more serious breeding venture. From Algeria they brought back two

Barbs with the idea of breeding from them. But this experiment was never carried out. Not until their journey to the Bedouin tribes of the Euphrates did they embark seriously upon the building up of a stud.

## CHAPTER IV

1. James Henry Skene tabulated the intricate rules for breeding horses *page 72* which the tribes preserved scrupulously along with their horses' pedigrees. No traveller before him, not even Burckhardt, had done this accurately. In Europe knowledge of the Arab breeds was practically lacking. Oddly, the only serious error made by Blunt in the appendices to Lady Anne's *Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates* was based on Skene's authority. He said that the Darley Arabian was of a strain of Kehailan blood called Ras-el-Fedaur instead of Managhi as he learned later was correct. With Skene's help the Blunts bought at Aleppo a two-year-old filly 'Dajanieh' that stood in their stud books afterwards as the original of a numerous and perfect progeny through her daughter 'Nefrissa' whose astonishing fertility produced while at Crabbet 21 living colts and fillies, the last foaled when she was 27. And they bought 'Sherifa,' a white Hamdaniyeh Simri, that had been bred in Nejd and given by Ibn Saoud five years before Blunt bought her to the Turkish governor of Mecca, who presented her to the Chief Ulema at Aleppo. He used her only as a brood mare and to carry him once a day to and from the mosque on a saddle of blue and gold. They also purchased their first stallion 'Kars' and the two mares 'Hagar' and 'Jerboa' that they rode on the journey. Hagar had been bred by the Gomussa, the most notable of horse-breeding tribes. At Deyr they made several more purchases: a chestnut mare, a Saadeh Togan; a three-year old bay filly, a Managieh Slaji; and a pony mare, also Managieh.

## CHAPTER V

1. To the second of Lady Anne's two volumes Blunt added an appendix *page 92* containing the precise information that they had gathered concerning the physical geography of northern Arabia, the history of the rise and fall of Wahhabism in Arabia, and 'the Euphrates Valley Railway and its kindred scheme of railway communication between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf'.

- page 98 2. Hogarth says in *The Penetration of Arabia* that the people of Hail 'had lately seen Doughty as well as Huber, and it is an open question if they had not by this time learned the true character of both Palgrave and Guarmani'. But it is more than doubtful if the Blunts knew at this time of Doughty's or Huber's journeys. In speaking of Theodore Bent's wife, Hogarth says that she was the only European woman beside Lady Anne to penetrate to the interior of Arabia. The Bents made their joint journey in 1897.
- page 99 3. Lady Anne inserted in her pilgrimage history an invaluable account of the horses of the Emir, including much information about Arab horses in general.
- page 100 4. The history of Wahhabism is a militant one, although when the Blunts went to Nejd the Wahhabi Empire was shrunk and broken by outward pressure and inward dissension. In 1878 the ruler of Nejd, Mohammed Ibn Rashid, was at least in name and outward practise a Wahhabi and Hail was a stronghold of Wahhabism. The followers of Mohammed Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab (said to have been born in 1691 or 1703 and to have died in 1791) were reported fanatical in their devotion to his teaching and in their hatred of all those who professed other views. It was small wonder that the Blunts were apprehensive.
- page 107 5. They corrected previous maps of the country along the pilgrim route as well as of Northern Arabia from Jôf to Hail.
- page 109 6. They brought back also information on rock formations and new altitude measurements of the plateau of Hail and Jebel Shammar.
- page 109 7. Wallin reached Hail on September 20th, 1845, and again in 1848 but the two brief accounts of his journeys which he submitted to the Royal Geographical Society were hardly known to English readers other than geographers. Palgrave arrived at Hail in July 1862; Guarmani in 1864, and both Huber and Doughty in 1878, a few months before the Blunts. Huber and Euting together did not reach Hail until 1883. Doughty was the first to appear at Hail undisguised and openly professing Christianity and was exceedingly unpopular among the townspeople. On his first visit he was protected by Ibn Rashid but on his second visit the Emir was away, and he had to be smuggled out of the town. Blunt like Doughty had been one of the few people to believe in Palgrave's accounts, though he recognized their exaggeration and frequent inaccuracy and found his account of Arabian horses absurd.

## CHAPTER VI

1. Blunt was of the opinion that India stood in no need, politically or *page 116* strategically, of such a line as the proposed Euphrates railway and that as a commercial speculation the scheme was a delusion. His paper is interesting particularly because no one else seems to have considered whether or no the proposed railway line could pay its way.
2. Sir Edward Hamilton, usually spoken of in Blunt's writings as Eddy *page 117* Hamilton, was Gladstone's private secretary from 1880-5 and later the Permanent Official Head of the Treasury.
3. This idea must be considered less 'wild' if the similarity of Wahhab- *page 122* ism and the teaching of Jemal-ed-Din is noted.
4. This journey over Jebel Hellal 'completed the circle of Blunt's politi- *page 131* cal relations with the northern tribes begun in 1878, and . . . left him on terms of friendship with every sheykh of importance from the Nile to the Tigris'.
5. When the Blunts met the Anazeh ten days ride from Damascus, they *page 132* obtained the celebrated Rodanich mare of which they had heard constant praises. Blunt paid £100 for her and she stood in their stud book as 'Rodania', producing for the Crabbet stud quite half its finest stock. He purchased also Meshura, a Seglawieh of the highest reputation who proved at Crabbet worthy of her fame, and Dahma, whose offspring made a name for themselves principally in Australia.
6. The chapters of *The Future of Islam* came out first in monthly num- *page 132* bers of the *Fortnightly Review* and had considerable effect in England. Later they appeared in book form among the English reading moslems of India and in translation amongst the Egyptians. Blunt wrote in an article for the *Nineteenth Century*, September 1882, 'it must be remembered that nothing at that time had appeared in print hinting so much as the possibility of new life and thought in Islam'. The book had considerable influence. The last chapter, as Blunt wrote to a friend in 1914, was 'curiously prophetic'. Jehu Junior wrote in *Vanity Fair*, January 31st, 1885, 'his book, *The Future of Islam*, contained a remarkable forecast, among other things of the Arab movement of 1882 and the career of the Mahdi'. Lord Lytton praised it highly for 'the stores of instruction and suggestion' which he found in it.

## CHAPTER VII

- page 135 1. Descendants of natives of Circassia who became masters of Egypt under the name of the Mameluke Beys. Early in the nineteenth century Mohammed Ali with the help of his Albanian troops treacherously murdered 500 of the Mamelukes, and replaced their rule with a new administration. Gradually he replaced his Albanians in command of the army by Turks or Circassians again, and employed them also for all authoritative executive posts in the civil service. His immediate successors followed him in this and the Turco-Circassian or Circassian element again became the ruling class.
- page 139 2. As Scott, *The Times* regular correspondent in Egypt, depended upon Colvin for most of his news, the ordinary *Times* articles were not fully informed. Thomas Chenery himself was a good Arabic scholar—he had been *Times* correspondent at Constantinople 1854–6; professor of Arabic at Oxford 1868–77; one of the revisers of the Old Testament; and the author of ‘a most admirable translation of the “Assemblies of Hariri”’. He was deeply interested in all that went on in Arabic speaking countries, and was influenced by the fact that he himself was an Egyptian bondholder. He gave every prominence to Blunt’s and Gregory’s letters during the next months and even when war came, continued to give the Nationalists a fair showing.
- page 139 3. The Khedive had promised on September 9th that the army should be increased to full legal strength. Sir Auckland Colvin thought ‘the sum proposed would suffice for an increase up to 15,000 men. I am quite certain,’ wrote Blunt, in the *Nineteenth Century*, September 1882, ‘that he told me this; and it is a point worth noticing, as it accounts in part at least for the promotion of officers so loudly complained of afterwards by the Controllers. It is obvious that every increase in the army would necessitate a corresponding increase and promotion of officers.’
- page 140 4. In his diary for December 1881 Sir Charles Dilke noted ‘Malet wrote from Cairo to Paris, telling me that he still had confidence in the moderation of the progressist party represented by Arabi and the Colonels, and that he was managing them through Wilfrid Blunt, who was acting as a go-between; but a little later on the relations between Blunt and Malet became such as to show that each had thought he was using the other as a tool.’

5. Because it resulted in advantage to England the Joint Note was *page 140* generally supposed in Egypt to have been conceived and planned at the British Foreign Office, whereas in reality it had been drafted at the Quai d'Orsay 'in the interests, so far as they were political—for they were also financial—of French ambition'. Lord Granville had delayed five days before signing the Note—a delay that Blunt attributed to the effect of his own Manifesto—and had added a characteristic postscript: 'Her Majesty's Government must not be considered as committing themselves thereby to any particular mode of action.' Malet and Colvin both condemned the Note. Malet telegraphed repeatedly for permission to add to it a written explanation such as he had asked Blunt to give Arabi, and wrote strongly condemning the note as dangerous and impolitic. 'There is not a word of this in the published papers, yet the documents must certainly exist.'
6. Blunt showed the draft of the letter to Gladstone's two private *page 147* secretaries, Hamilton and Godley, to see if they could suggest improvement. The tone was moderate and fair and both secretaries approved it, especially Godley, Hamilton's senior, who made Blunt strike out a phrase of apology for interfering in this important public matter, 'saying emphatically, "your interference needs no excuse"'. Both he and Hamilton urged that the letter be sent at once.
7. It is curious to note that Morley who in 1879 opposed the intervention *page 150* of England and France in Egyptian affairs and after the battle of Tel-el-Kebir deprecated annexation, from 1880 to September 1882 was a Jingo of Jingoes in regard to English intervention in Egypt. His chapter on Egypt in his *Life of Gladstone* is remarkable for the fact that he so presents his material as to imply not what was actually the fact but what a follower of Gladstone would like in later years to believe to have been true. This misrepresentation may perhaps be excused by the extremely summary nature of his dealings in this book with Egypt necessitated by lack of space. An example of his treatment of the subject occurs for instance, when he speaks of the result of the Joint Note of January 6th, 1881, in ousting France and installing England in control of Egypt: 'So extraordinary a result shows how impenetrable were the windings of the labyrinth. The foremost statesmen of England and France were in their

conning towers, and England at any rate employed some of the ablest of her agents.' He omits to note that the statesmen in England paid not the slightest attention to the advice of their agents at Cairo.

- page 152* 8. The first telegram, to Arabi, ran '... Lord Granville states in Parliament that Sultan Pasha and the Deputies have joined the Khedive against you. If untrue, let Sultan Pasha telegraph me contradiction. United you have nothing to fear. Could you not form a ministry with Sultan Pasha as Prime Minister? But stand firm.' The next, to Sultan Pasha, '... I trust that all who love Egypt will stand together. Do not quarrel with Arabi. The danger is too great.' These two were intended to supplement each other and designed to bring Arabi and Sultan to terms together. Finally Blunt sent off telegrams, all alike, to six deputies: 'Parti National, est-il actuellement content d'Arabi. Le gouvernement Anglais prétend le contraire. Si vous laissez désunir de l'armée, l'Europe vous annexera.'
- page 155* 9. The telegram from Malet ran: 'the Khedive sent for M. Sienkiewicz and me this morning and informed us that it had come to his knowledge that the military intended this afternoon to depose him and proclaim Halim Pasha as Khedive of Egypt. ... The Khedive said he hardly believed the truth of this information.'

#### CHAPTER VIII

- page 156* 1. By March 1909 Harrison and Blunt had diverged from what had for 27 years been a common political sympathy about Foreign Affairs into antagonism, Harrison's path being towards war with Germany, Blunt's towards a gradual shedding of our 'white man's burden' in Egypt and India.
- page 158* 2. After the Egyptian uprising Blunt held no communication with Malet until August 1897 when he received a cordial letter from Malet expressing regret for their troubled relations in the past and enclosing a number of manuscript poems which Malet had found among his mother's papers attributed to Blunt. They turned out to have been written by Schomberg Kerr in 1861 and 1864 when both he and Blunt were much with Lady Malet. Blunt returned them to Malet with a letter which he hoped would bring about a renewal of friendly relations.

3. The conference of great European Powers—Turkey ironically excepted *page 158*—was the European Congress which met at Constantinople on June 23rd, 1882, to discuss means of preserving in Egypt the rights of the Sultan, the Khedive, Europe and the Egyptian people.
4. People—or the newspapers—in England were very angry, charging *page 159* Arabi with having retired under a flag of truce. This charge of violation of the white flag was later brought against Arabi at his trial and ‘absurdly insisted upon’ by Gladstone who committed himself to the statement that to retire under the white flag was a violation of the laws of war although Admiral Seymour had said at the time that he would understand the white flag to mean evacuation of the forts. The charge was persisted in till it was discovered in Lord Wolseley’s *Soldier’s Pocket Book*, a text book of the British army, that the contrary was the rule.
5. Mr. Guedalla notes that by ‘Cattawayo’ the Queen meant ‘Cetewayo *page 166* of Zululand’ who had recently been much fêted in England.
6. The charges against Arabi were to be based on the abuse of the white *page 168* flag, complicity in the massacres and pillage of June 11th, complicity in the destruction by fire of Alexandria, and general acts of mutiny and rebellion against the Khedive and the Sultan.
7. Blunt continued to be Arabi’s friend—not only visiting him at *page 169* Ceylon but entertaining him many times at Sheykh Obeyd on his release and return to Egypt as a broken and prematurely old man, urging the Egyptian Government and above all the Nationalists to pay him tribute at the time of his death, and defending him against defamatory articles after his death. See especially Blunt’s articles in the *Nineteenth Century*, September 1892, and *Egypt*, October 1911.
8. Broadley was charged with retaining a letter from Arabi, with receiv- *page 170* ing a salary of £100 a month from the ex-Khedive Ismaïl and with various other far from straight procedures in his relations with Blunt and the Nationalist sympathizers during Arabi’s trial. Beaman had written several letters to Blunt in which he had said that he knew enough of the facts concerning the Khedive’s complicity in the Alexandrian riots to convict Tewfik. He had been keenly against the Palace party and sympathetic with Blunt. Suddenly on August 11th a letter was published in *The Times* disclaiming for Beaman any disapproval of Tewfik. This letter was authorized by Beaman.



page 175 9. It is noteworthy in view of Blunt's later Irish adventures to find in Mrs. Dugdale's *Life of Lord Balfour*, Vol. 1, page 173, a private letter from Balfour written in 1889, during his struggle as Chief Secretary to Ireland with the Plan of Campaign, urging the purchase of the Ponsonby estate by a syndicate, followed by Mrs. Dugdale's statement that 'the sequel to this is in the report of Parliamentary Questions of March 12th, 14th, 18th, when Balfour blandly denied all "official knowledge" of the purchase of the Ponsonby estate by a syndicate.' It illustrates the division between public and private life and morality which is so convenient to the official, so bewildering to the layman, and which Blunt tried to combat.

page 175 10. There were many objections to *The Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* at the time of its publication—most of them made less on the charge of its being an untrue or distorted picture than of its being an unwarranted exposure. 'Button' threatened proceedings, though he later excused himself. Frederic Harrison complained on the part of Malet, Colvin and Hamilton, though they themselves made no complaint. On the other hand Blunt also received many commendatory letters confirming his account—one, for instance from Lord Eversley who had been a member of the Government in 1882. *Egypt and its Betrayal*, a book written by Farman, Consul General for the United States of America in Egypt in Ismail's time and until after the bombardment of Alexandria, corroborates Blunt's account.

Such allusions as the following from Lord Zetland's biography of Lord Cromer are still met with, though with decreasing frequency: 'But if Baring showed impatience at the sentimentality of visionaries like Blunt and at the crochets of philanthropists whose emotions outran their reason. . . .' On the other hand Blunt is referred to in *Lord Carnock* by Harold Nicolson as 'that splendid eccentric' although Mr. Nicolson does not uphold Blunt's politics. Mr. Nicolson also writes that Lord Carnock 'never contended . . . that our attitude in the Egyptian question was throughout wholly defensible. When nearly thirty years later a Foreign Office official was declaiming in righteous indignation against Italy's sudden descent on Tripoli, he was startled to find himself checked by a flash of sudden wrath in the blue eyes of his chief. "It is not for us," said Arthur Nicolson, "to cast that sort of stone".'

## CHAPTER IX

1. 'Some years afterwards,' Blunt wrote in *Gordon at Khartoum*, 'he page 178 came round to my views and tried to get up a native Egyptian ministry favourable to England out of the débris of the Nationalist Party, going even to the length of consulting me about those capable of composing it; but it was then too late, and English policy in Egypt has floundered ever since in a Serbonian bog of irreconcilable native hostility. He would have done better to have taken my advice in 1885.'
2. This statement was the memorandum which Arabi made for Lord page 180 Dufferin and had already given to Blunt, with such changes as the passing of a year made necessary. 'It reiterates,' wrote Blunt in *Gordon at Khartoum*, 'the truth which underlay the whole Egyptian position, namely, that the supposed necessity of maintaining Tewfik on the Khedivial throne at Cairo must, if persisted in, vitiate any attempt to restore self-government to the Egyptians, or to free England from the prolonged responsibility of protecting him with an occupying force. It suggests in what way constitutional government could be restored, and enumerates a variety of reforms, most of which have been subsequently made part of English policy. About the Soudan, too, the affairs of which were to become a main subject of interest for those responsible for Egypt's welfare, it contains a remarkable paragraph.'
3. Anglo-Indian now officially means Eurasian; but it is used by Blunt page 182 to mean the English living in India.
4. In *India* ('Modern World Series') Sir Valentine Chirol speaks of the page 185 Indian National Congress meeting for the first time in Bombay in the last days of 1885. No mention is made of the earlier conference of which that later was a continuation.
5. Seymour Keay was a banker living at Hyderabad who had helped the page 186 Nizam's late minister, Salar Jung, 'to draft his political claims on the British Government, especially in respect to the Berar Provinces'. 'His connection with Salar Jung,' wrote Blunt in *The Secret History . . . Part II, India*, 'had made him acquainted with all the ins and outs of the scandalous persecution to which that great native statesman had been subjected by the Indian Government, nor did he scruple to make use of his knowledge as occasion served in native interests. This made him a thorn in the side of the Calcutta Foreign Office. In 1885, having made a

considerable fortune, he returned to England, and was elected to Parliament by a Scotch borough as an extreme radical.' Blunt had made his acquaintance in England in connection with a pamphlet Keay published in 1882 called *Spoiling the Egyptians, a Tale of Shame*, an effective exposition of the financial intrigues leading to England's bombardment of Alexandria.

page 186 6. He arranged for the sending of four Arab horses from India to take part in the forthcoming Arab race at Newmarket. In the horses of the Nizam of Hyderabad and of his new minister young Salar Jung he was especially interested.

page 187 7. Lord Ripon's viceroyalty at first encouraged the natives, Blunt believed, because he inspired their confidence by his moral integrity, simplicity and paternal manner; understood the part played by religion in Indian politics—possibly Blunt thought with natural prejudice in favour of his own Church, because he was a Roman Catholic of extraordinary piety; and followed in his first public acts the liberal principles announced by Gladstone. Later for a time Blunt felt that he became corrupted by 'association with his Whig friends in Office'.

page 192 8. When Blunt returned to England he met Gordon's friend Brocklehurst who told him that 'Gordon had asked repeatedly for him when he was starting for Egypt'. 'It is a thousand pities,' Blunt observed, 'that I did not see him (being away in India), as I could have prevented his making the mistake of going to Tewfik and neglecting to go to Mahdi.' Lady Gregory wrote to Blunt in May, 1885, 'I have been reading only now Gordon's Journals, and think you ought to feel very proud and very glad that your name seemed so sometimes to stand between him and injustice—"I shall have Wilfrid Blunt making a nice row about this".'

page 192 9. On September 8th, 1882, Blunt had received from Eddy Hamilton a letter in which the following sentence occurred: 'Some months ago (this, please, is quite private) certain enquiries were made about Ireland, and the result of these enquiries was, to the best of my recollection, that he, Gordon, was not clothed in the rightest of minds.' This observation had been drawn from Hamilton by Blunt's forwarding to Gladstone through him a letter from Gordon about 'the mess' Malet and Colvin had made at Cairo—a letter which confirmed the Government in their judgment of Gordon's state of mind.

10. In *Gordon and the Sudan* by Bernard M. Allen. page 194
11. In dealing with Egyptian affairs in general Lord Cromer's prejudice is evident. He speaks for instance of 'some illiterate Egyptian, of the type of Arabi or Mahmoud Sami'. Neither of these leaders was illiterate, in fact Sami was exceptionally learned and intellectual. In dealing with Blunt, Lord Cromer's prejudice is not unnaturally equally prejudiced. In the only passage concerning Blunt allowed the dignity of inclusion in the text of *Modern Egypt*, he says: 'At one period of the proceedings, his services were utilized as an intermediary between Sir Edward Malet and the nationalists. The selection was unfortunate, for it is abundantly clear from the account which Mr. Blunt has given of his own proceedings (Blunt's *Secret History of the British Occupation of Egypt*) that, with the exception of some knowledge of the Arabic language, he possessed none of the qualifications necessary to ensure success in the execution of so difficult and delicate a mission. He advised the nationalists to hold to the army or they would be "annexed to Europe". The advice was, without doubt, well-meant, but it was certainly inopportune and mischievous. Whatever danger of "annexation to Europe" existed lay rather in the direction of the consolidation of the national and military parties than in that of their separation. A trained politician would have seen this.' Lord Cromer omits to mention that Blunt was successful as intermediary in every case except that concerning the Budget, wherein any intermediary must have failed; he also fails to state that the telegram which he quotes was sent by Blunt to certain of the Deputies on May 15th, some months after he had ceased to be employed as intermediary and after circumstances had so changed as to make it evident that the nationalists could hope for little if the army's support were withdrawn from them.
12. While he was still in India an official letter had come from Baring page 195 delivering a message from Sherif Pasha that he would not be permitted to land in Egypt. Though the order worked little hardship on Blunt at the moment, he saw in it 'a fine opening for exposing if I choose, Mr. Gladstone's hot and cold-blowing about Arabi's restoration'. On Button's advice, Blunt's first move on returning to London was to obtain a legal opinion upon the case. Finding that he had no legal grounds upon which to

combat exile, he determined to take up the matter diplomatically and, despite the assurances of various friends that the Foreign Office had nothing to do with the case, he sent in a statement to Lord Granville. On August 4th the case came up in the House of Commons. In the morning a Blue Book on the subject had been published. In the debate the Government had little defence to put up. 'On the whole,' Blunt wrote, 'I think it has strengthened my position, not only with the public but with the Government. The House was decidedly favourable to me in the debate.' During the debate Blunt's purpose of exposing Gladstone's varying attitudes toward Egypt and the Government's personal animus against himself had been achieved. As nothing more could be gained Blunt dropped the matter until the following year when the Conservatives came into office with Lord Salisbury as Prime Minister.

- page 195 13. Blunt's high opinion of the Mahdi's wisdom, honour and power was never extended to the Mahdi's successor, the Khalifa Abdullah, who seemed to Blunt less wise both morally and practically and to be less easy to treat with.
- page 197 14. 'We' refers to Blunt and George Howard. The photograph of the Sheykh taken on this occasion is the frontispiece of 'The Secret History Series,' Vol. 1.
- page 198 15. He was asked among other things to procure for the son of one of his friends a talisman from Jemal-ed-Din as protection in case the son was captured by the Mahdi. This Blunt did on condition that the talisman should not be used for any *ruse de guerre*.
- page 199 16. Khartoum fell on January 26th, 1885; news of the disaster reached London on February 5th; and news of Gordon's death came on February 10th.
- page 200 17. The report was incorrect. In the words of an officer of the British Army of Occupation it was 'a stiff fight and honours were equal'.

#### CHAPTER X

- page 208 1. Blunt's adherence to Lord Randolph caused much perturbation among his friends and was particularly opposed by Mrs. Howard. Her husband, however, rejoiced: 'He says,' reported Blunt, 'that I will ruin the Tory party.' Percy Wyndham was more encouraging. He had a high opinion of Lord Randolph. 'You two,' he

said, 'if you stick to your principle of telling the truth at all costs may yet save England.'

2. Middleton thought that he had obtained the constituency of Southwark for Blunt. But Button, upon whom Blunt still depended for aid and advice, played him false, managing to have his own brother, Lord Mayo, asked to a meeting of the Southwark electors and selected as their candidate, frightening them away from Blunt by saying that he was an out and out home-ruler whereas Lord Mayo was an Orange Landlord. Middleton then found Blunt another constituency.

#### CHAPTER XI

1. The wisdom of Blunt's case was shown in October 1887 when the following letter appeared in the *Birmingham Daily Post* signed 'Justice': 'Seeing a paragraph in your paper lately respecting the arrest of Mr. Blunt in Ireland, and also of Lady Anne Blunt being roughly used, I am at a loss to understand why they should go to Ireland to speak against evictions when a poor woman, with either 6 or 8 children, was turned out of her home by Lady Anne Blunt's agent on her estate, not a dozen miles from Birmingham and at the time they were quite destitute of any means or home. The above event occurred only about a fortnight ago.' The matter was given publicity and naturally used to Blunt's political detriment. Actually the legal ownership of the property—about 40 acres in scattered parcels interwoven with a larger settled estate of her father, the Earl of Lovelace and managed by his agent—was vested in a trustee. Lady Anne had only a limited interest in it under peculiar circumstances which prevented her exercising independent management. She was not consulted when notice was served on the tenants though her name was used on the notice. Immediately she heard of the matter she had it looked into. No injustice or harshness was found. The tenant, being in arrear with his rent, had received at Lady-Day an ordinary six-months notice to quit and had left at Michaelmas with his family. He was not destitute, and he took his belongings with him and had a home to go to. After considerable correspondence in *The Times* the affair was dropped.
2. The Irish Land League was a great organization comprising all the tenants' defence societies in the country. It held its first meeting

in Dublin on October 21st, 1879. Its slogan was, 'Ireland for the Irish and the land for the people.'

- page 229 3. 'He has given up wine,' wrote Jehu Junior in *Vanity Fair*, January 31st, 1885, 'as a matter of principle, and tobacco as a matter of health.' On May 28th, 1898, Blunt recorded in his diary, 'I have taken to wine after 15 years total abstinence.'
- page 229 4. Lady Gregory could never quite forgive Blunt for his Irish doings. Years later she wrote that it was a pity he was not in Ireland, it would be so easy to get himself imprisoned—'and think what good letters you could write from prison and you could finish all your poems'.
- page 230 5. The Plan of Campaign was a plan for renewed agrarian agitation worked out by William O'Brien, John Dillon and Tim Harrington. On each estate where the landlord had refused to lower the rent reasonably the tenants were to contribute to a common fund an amount equal to what they thought a fair rent. This fund was to be managed by a committee who, backed by the fund, could either persuade the landlord to accept a fair rent or, in the case of need, support the evicted tenants.
- page 232 6. Balfour's Crimes Act was enacted in April 1887. It had all the worst features of past coercion bills with the added insupportable feature of being unlimited to any certain number of years.

#### CHAPTER XII

- page 251 1. In a letter to *The Times* published on March 23rd after his release, Blunt re-stated his case, and answered the criticism that the conversation with Balfour was improbable by saying that Balfour's words were perhaps intended as a warning to him and through him to the Irish leaders, for Balfour undoubtedly would have preferred his opponents to fly to America rather than stay to be imprisoned by him; that the language of Balfour's remarks was such as certain circles habitually applied to the Irish question; that Balfour at the time of the conversation had almost no personal knowledge of the forces he had to deal with in Ireland; that the policy he announced in the conversation had for a short time been carried out. The conversation Blunt said was entirely serious and took place on Sunday, September 4th, 1887, at about 5 p.m. between the two men alone. Balfour replied to this letter by dubbing Blunt's statement 'a grotesque and ridiculous false-

hood', saying that he never wished the death of any Irish representative, and holding Blunt responsible for the garbled accounts of his statement published during his imprisonment. Blunt retorted that, as his requests in prison to make the statement on oath or to have it reported *verbatim* in writing, or to have his solicitor present, were all refused he was hardly responsible for its various versions. Balfour continued to deny the Clounds conversation, passing Blunt's charges off with bland humour, and the affair faded away. William O'Brien voiced the opinion held by Blunt's Irish supporters in a speech in Ireland: 'I knew that Mr. Blunt was a man who would let his hand wither away in the fire before he would tell a lie.'

2. Peter O'Brien: Solicitor General for Ireland, 1887; Attorney *page 252* General, 1888; Lord Chief Justice, 1889; made a baronet, 1891; raised to the peerage as Baron O'Brien of Kilfenora, 1900.
3. Possibly Blunt's support of the Plan of Campaign was the cause of *page 255* Parnell's failure to uphold him. The question of how far Parnell opposed the Plan is difficult to answer. In his speech at the Eighty Club dinner on May 8th, 1888—at which Blunt also had been asked to speak but had refused in order to see Dillon through his trial—Parnell gave his first public indication of repudiating the Plan, and yet he remarked to Lady Anne, next whom he was sitting, that the Plan had been 'the saving of the Irish people'. As regards his sending no word of sympathy to Blunt—that is amply explained by his carefully fostered hatred of the English and equally well-cultivated manner of indifference.

#### CHAPTER XIII

1. The picturesque story of a tragedy resulting from his protection even *page 260* of wolves is told in characteristic fashion by Blunt in his diary for February 14th, 1901. (*My Diaries*, Vol. II).
2. It begins with the unpromising verses: *page 261*

Care killed a cat and I have many cares at home  
Which vex me mightily and disturb my bed.

The Poem as a whole, however, though less fine than many of the *Sonnets of Proteus*, is good.

3. Known familiarly as Chancery Ring. *page 274*
4. The members of the first Crabtree Club 'consisted besides the Herbert *page 276*



brothers, of Eddy Hamilton, Lord Lewisham, Jocelyn Amherst, Granny Farquhar, Lionel Bathurst, with Harry Brand (afterwards Lord Hampden), Nigel Kingscote, Godfrey Webb, Button Bourke, Frank Lascelles, Mark Napier, and half-a-dozen more' of Blunt's own intimates.

- page 282 5. The first three chapters—'through the horses of Greece and Rome'—were finished and parts of later chapters. Blunt had made extensive researches concerning the horse, had read widely, talked with many scholars—Huxley, Wallace, and others—even studied the fossil bones of primeval horses in the Natural History Museum and visited Prevalsky's horse at the Zoo. Both he and Lady Anne were greatly helped in gathering material for their 'horse books' by Sydney Cockerell, at that time Blunt's secretary. Lady Wentworth, in her comprehensive study of the horse, *Thoroughbred Racing Stock*, says that she has used the vast store of material amassed by her parents 'as a quarry in which to find everything relating to horse history'. It will doubtless also furnish much material for her specialized study, *The Authentic Arabian Horse*.
- page 283 6. *The Stealing of the Mare* is dedicated 'To Charles Doughty, Esq., in recognition of His Knowledge, the most complete among Englishmen, of Arabian things.' 'I am reading Doughty's book about Arabia,' Blunt noted in his diary of April 26th, 1888, 'which is by far the best ever written. It is exhaustive and accurate, though less sympathetic with Arabian ideas than I expected. He sees the worse rather than the better nature of the people.'
- page 287 7. In response to Lord Dufferin's request for one of Blunt's books to put in 'Helen's Tower Library'—'a library where he had got together 400 volumes presented by authors, and which is named after his mother'—Blunt gave Lord Dufferin a copy of the Kelmscott edition of his *Proteus Sonnets*. In it he inscribed a sonnet, the first letters of whose lines spelled Dufferin's mother's name. Blunt's inscribed sonnet was privately printed with the poems inscribed by their authors in the 400 other volumes.

#### CHAPTER XIV

- page 301 1. Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 1908-1937.
- page 301 2. To his profound disgust Blunt soon learned that the rumour which he had heard months before was true, the well was to be leased to a

soda water company at £500 a year. Father Beauclerk, in charge of the shrine seemed 'sadly impractical', so Blunt gave him 'a cheque for £20 towards legal expenses', but determined to put the case in other hands. In London he saw a lawyer and soon news came that the Duke of Westminster, Lord of the Manor in which the well was situated, would take action in the matter. In the end the shrine was preserved.

3. At rare intervals throughout his early and middle life Blunt had *page 317* debated, if not going up to the University, at least living at Oxford. And in 1899 he told York Powell, whom he was visiting at Christ Church, that he had half seriously consulted Jowett fifteen years earlier about the possibility of his entering the University as an undergraduate. 'Jowett said "You could never pass the examination for Balliol, but might try Christ Church." "Insolent dog," said Powell, resenting the slur on his college.'

#### CHAPTER XV

1. The two portraits may be found side by side in Archibald Henderson's *page 322* Biography of Shaw, 1911, opposite page 260.

Neville Lytton's fine chalk drawing of Blunt himself, done at about this time, was sold to an American in 1914.

2. Blunt's prison article appeared in the *English Review*, September *page 324* 1910. He wrote a supplementary article for the *Observer*, September 18th, 1910.

In 1906 when the Education Bill came on, Blunt had suggested an education policy to George Wyndham, leader of the opposition, which he promised to follow. It was extremely conservative: the three R's were to be compulsory and paid for by the State. 'No child should be compelled to go beyond this or to attend school after 12 years old.' This State school was to be undenominational. Each denomination should provide more advanced schooling for its members if they wished it. 'This would certainly be enough in the country schools, and would help to keep labourers on the land.'

3. *Gordon at Khartoum* and *The Land War* were published by Stephen *page 328* Swift & Company. In mid-October 1912, Swift (alias Granville) absconded with the till including £55 of Blunt's.
4. Shaw's preface to *John Bull's Other Island* upholds Blunt's point of *page 329*

view on the Denshawai affair. Blunt also gave Shaw the suggestion for *The Doctor's Dilemma*.

- page 330 5. Sir Charles Rivers Wilson: Comptroller of Egyptian National debt, 1874; Minister of Finance for a short time under the Khedive Ismail; President of International Commission of Liquidation; Member of Council of Suez Canal; etc. . . . Though deeply imbued with the financial and anti-Nationalist point of view, he told Blunt that both *Gordon at Khartoum* and *Egypt's Ruin* were very accurate and had converted him on many points regarding Egypt.
- page 336 6. The eight poets were: Richard Aldington, F. S. Flint, Frederic Manning, John Masefield (who in the end was unable to get to Newbuildings for the occasion), Sturge Moore, Victor Plarr, Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats.
- page 337 7. Blunt had made acquaintance, through Lord Lytton in 1870, with Count Gobineau when he was in sore financial straits and the Prussians were in occupation of his country house. Blunt helped him and after the war became his close friend. 'I have,' Blunt wrote, 'some thirty or forty of his letters, chiefly on literary subjects, and his own private copy of his celebrated book *Sur L'inégalité de Races Humaines*. . . . He was a very agreeable man with much imagination, a bit of a poet and a bit of an artist, besides being an excellent talker on all subjects.' In 1913 Blunt said that Gobineau was in some ways like himself, 'a man of ideas opposed to those of his own people and his own generation, and who, though his talent was recognized as a writer, failed to find disciples in France. He was an aristocrat in a democratic age, an orientalist, out of harmony with received orientalist ideas, a poet who was never popular, and an artist who was never more than an amateur. . . . Gobineau like me had his romantic side.'

#### CHAPTER XVI

- page 343 1. In connection with the talk prevalent in 1917 of the evils of secret diplomacy and the hypocrisy, and worse, to which it led, Blunt wrote, 'I think I was quite the first person to expose the danger of this secrecy as a cause of war. I did this in a lecture I gave at Toynbee Hall some thirty years ago with Frederic Harrison in the chair.'

2. As early as 1904 when he was still squire at Crabbet, he had worked *page 355* out a scheme for the better housing of the poorer tenants in pursuance of a plan published by him in the *Nineteenth Century*. He erected according to his own plans a labourer's cottage at Blackwater, one of the Crabbet farms, of galvanized iron to prove that such cottages might be put up more cheaply than the old sort and would be healthier but would call for less rent. The scheme brought him much approbation notably an enthusiastic letter from Charles Doughty, though the cottage contravened the by-laws of the rural council. (The by-laws were later made more liberal and up to date.) Two years afterwards he wrote an article for the *Nineteenth Century* on 'Possibilities of Peasant Ownership in Sussex,' based on a plan for the wider distribution of land by the sub-division of large estates.
3. When his Estate Agent, Caffin, told Blunt of the outcome of the sale *page 358* tears ran down Blunt's cheeks: 'It has taken three hundred years for my family to build up this estate,' he said, 'and now in a minute it is gone.'
4. Lady Anne came into the title on the death of Mary, daughter of her brother Ralph by his first marriage. On Lady Anne's death the title descended to the Blunts' daughter Judith, the present Lady Wentworth.
5. In ancient times the title would have entitled Blunt as Lady Anne's *page 359* husband to a seat among the Peers. 'Now it will bring no new dignity or advantage of any but a genealogical kind, but as such is worth claiming.'
6. Blunt took for the model of the monument for Lady Anne's grave *page 359* one of the eighteenth-century simple rectangular tombs in Shipley Churchyard. He drew it to scale and with Sydney Cockerell's help had the English inscription for one side put into good eighteenth-century script. On the other side the inscription was to be done into Arabic. On the two ends were to go the coats of arms.
7. The only bequest that he made to a Roman Catholic institution was for *page 371* the up-keep of the chapel and monument to his brother and sister in the Franciscan Monastery at Crawley. He bequeathed to Professor Edward G. Browne, Professor of Arabic in Cambridge University, £200 asking him to apply it as a subscription to any mosque that might be built by the voluntary subscription of

Mohammedans in London of which Professor Browne might approve. He also left a sum to the Quakers—and no one suspects him of being a Quaker. Perhaps the safest way is to believe his own words spoken in his old age to the effect that he held no one creed or system of religious belief.

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